

milf smackdown: the bonus chapters

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milf smackdown: the bonus chapters

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Summary

But wait! There's more!

Notes

buckle up kids because this might hurt... i mean obviously these girlyies had to do SOMETHING to make hyunjin hate them right? - daniela

P.S. threw in some spoilers for star wars TROS even though this is in the past so we're just gonna pretend that in MSD world that movie came out in like. the beginning of october. k? k:)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [milf smackdown](#) by garlicbread, strawberriesNcigarettes

3Jin, an origin story

Chapter Notes

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“Hey you! I’ll race you down the slides!”

Heejin hesitates as she looks down at the unfamiliar girl climbing up the playground’s rock wall to her left. The stranger, for a five-year old, is relatively tall, wearing a red t-shirt and had a piece of mulch in hair that was spilling sloppily out of the ponytail it was in.

Heejin’s first day of kindergarten has so far been sunny and bright, but filled with intimidation from other more sociable kids in her classroom. For the most part, she’d kept to herself.

But now it was her first recess, and classmates were running around with each other, squealing and giggling together. Heejin was wandering the school playground aimlessly without any companions.

The girl in the red shirt flops onto the platform recklessly. She bounces back up immediately and pushes past Heejin, running up a steep structure of green and purple steps.

“Come on, don’t be a baby!” The girl yells, nearing the highest platform of the jungle gym.

“I’m not a baby.” Heejin insists, her bottom lip popping out into a pout. She slides her little hands down her bright pink shirt to make sure no dirt was on her. She looks up, eyes wide at the sight of the two *gigantic* orange and blue double slides that loop around each other.

(Well, gigantic to her. She was only five years old and still struggled climbing onto her couch sometimes.)

“It’s fun!” A different, brighter voice says from behind her. Heejin turns around to see a girl dressed in a fluffy yellow sweater and sneakers bounding up the steps, her hair equally as messy as the girl at the top of the slide, hair clips hanging on by mere strands.

“The slide is bigger than me,” the girl in yellow says, meeting Heejin with a smile, one of her front teeth missing. “But I still got on and I’m OKAY! Hi! I’m Hyunjin!” She gives Heejin an encouraging thumbs up.

“I’m Heejin.” The little girl in pink says, her tone soft and almost inaudible in comparison to Hyunjin’s energetic borderline screams. Heejin’s 5 year old brain did the math for Hyunjin’s slide ideology. *Hyunjin is smaller than the slide, but she still got on and seemed unharmed*. It was a very convincing argument for a kindergartner. However, Heejin remains cautious.

“But... You’re taller than me.” Heejin points out and Hyunjin’s eyebrows furrow as she takes in

this new information. Hyunjin was no taller than an average kitchen counter, but Heejin's observation was true nonetheless.

Hyunjin gasps dramatically, a whistle accidentally sounding out because of her missing tooth.

"I HAVE A PLAN!" She yells. "I'll just go down the slide with you! 'Cause we know I can do it. So you'll be safe!" Hyunjin says, her eyebrows crinkled and determined, nodding her head in affirmation of her gameplan. The little girl in yellow holds out her hand for Heejin to take. Heejin thinks carefully about the idea, letting gears shift in her mind.

"Come *on*! You guys are so slow!" The other girl without a name yells down, a daring and teasing tone in her voice bellowing down the stairs as she continues to wait.

Heejin takes Hyunjin's hand and together they run up to one of the double slides.

"She wants to make sure it's safe, so I'm going with her." Hyunjin says, scooting herself behind Heejin so her legs were around the smaller girl's waist. The warmth of their bodies together is foreign, but comfortable.

"Okay losers." The girl in red says, sticking her tongue out.

"We'll beat you to the bottom. I'm poz-ee-tiff." Hyunjin says, trying to incorporate new vocabulary she had heard her mom say earlier. "If we lose you can have my Pop-Tart at snack time."

"Deal!" The unnamed girl says excitedly, getting ready to slide.

"Ready?" Hyunjin says, and Heejin squeals, grabbing on to Hyunjin's ankles for dear life.

"3."

"2."

"1!"

Hyunjin pushes forward, sending herself and Heejin down the towering slide with force. Heejin's eyes shut tight but she feels the ride in slow motion, a surge of wind shooting through her hair and adrenaline going through her veins.

Hyunjin shouts cheers of joy, giving Heejin confidence to open her eyes. The girl in pink smiles widely as they near the bottom enjoying the rest of the ride. However, the girl racing them is already waiting, watching as Heejin and Hyunjin fumble to the floor once they reach it.

"Ow." They both say.

The red shirt girl looks down in amusement. "I won! That was funny!" She says, beginning to giggle.

The racing partners follow in her laughter, as the standing girl helps them up off the ground.

"I won't take your Pop-Tart though... Only if you tell me your names. Mine's Ryujin." she says, waiting for a response.

"Hyunjin." The girl in yellow introduces herself, waving slightly at Ryujin.

"Heejin," says the other.

“Cool. Heejin and Hyunjin. Let’s go again!” Ryujin shouts, causing all three girls to race to the top of the slide, eager to feel the thrilling rush once more.

After that historic recess, Heejin, Hyunjin, and Ryujin sat together at snack time and played together at recess every single day they could, without fail. An unspoken bond had formed, and even as little kindergarteners, the three looked after each other. If one of them scraped their knee during playtime, one always got the band aid, and the other would fight the person who pushed them.

Heejin, Hyunjin, and Ryujin never admitted it out loud, but they all knew that happenstance at the slides was a match made in heaven.

As the three girls matured, snack time together turned into lunch time together, every class together and just about *everything* together. It didn’t matter what it was, because as long as they were doing it together, the trio could never go wrong.

It was a friendship unbreakable by any obstacle they would ever face.

Until high school.

“Hyunjin get your ass up!”

Hyunjin felt a slap on the back of her head when she awoke in the middle of her math class at Dalla High, drool threatening to come out of her mouth. The sound of classmates chattering in hushed tones as her teacher attempts to present a lesson registers in Hyunjin’s ears as she sits up. She looks back at the person sitting next to her with a glare.

Ryujin, short brown hair draping onto the shoulders of her USWNT hoodie, was doing everything in her power to stop herself from laughing at Hyunjin’s disoriented posture.

“*Don’t fucking slap me!*” Hyunjin whisper-yells, a little louder than she anticipated. Ryujin chuckles while peeping at the teacher, who doesn’t hear a word of it.

“Knock it off you two, you’re going to get us all in trouble.”

Heejin, sporting dark ripped jeans and a baggy maroon long-sleeved *Santa Cruz* shirt, turns around to make eye contact with her friends behind her.

“Since when do you care about school, Ryan Scheckler?” Ryujin retorts. Hyunjin hits Ryujin playfully.

Hyunjin’s giggling, but her eyes soften as she turns her attention to Heejin. “But really what does it matter?”

“Cause and effect. Cause: You two being dumbasses. Effect: You get sent to detention and I have to hear you both complain about missing practice all night.”

“Aren’t we in history class? Why are you teaching us a science lesson?” Ryujin says, throwing a crumpled up piece of paper at Heejin, who swats it away.

“We’re in geometry, idiot.” Heejin says, throwing her pen back, only for it to be caught.

“Thanks, I needed a new one.” Ryujin puckers her lips in a very exaggerated way and sends an air

kiss to the other girl.

“Die.” Heejin says, but she’s trying hard not to smile now.

“She can’t die, because then who’d take her place in being the world’s dumbest lesbian?”

Ryujin punches Hyunjin in the arm and Heejin loses it.

Hyunjin’s eyes gleam as Heejin’s laugh breaks through the surface. Hyunjin and Heejin have always had a softer relationship with each other than with Ryujin. Sure, they made fun of each other from time to time, but there was always a hint of care in every punchline.

Heejin was always there for Hyunjin without fail, no matter what it was. Hyunjin made sure to do the same for her in return. It was like they both had their own personal caretaker.

When the two of them were with each other, they could say whatever was on their mind without being scared of judgement. Hyunjin just... couldn’t do that with Ryujin for some reason. She loved the girl, don’t get her wrong, but Heejin just sparked such a unique warmth and familiarity in Hyunjin and vice versa. (But Hyunjin would rather die than to ever say that out loud.)

Ryujin’s eyes roll looking between the girls.

Most of these days, she notices Hyunjin’s eyes beaming.

And if Hyunjin was looking at anyone else like that, Ryujin might make fun of the girl, just to get some sort of rise out of her. Except Hyunjin was *always* looking at Heejin. The girl Ryujin had come to adore, even when she threw playful banter Heejin’s way - at least, she hoped it came across as playful, the girl was terrible at expressing her feelings.

Ryujin had been making an effort to try harder when it came to Heejin though. It was just the way Heejin always understood how she was feeling, even without saying much. She was delicate in a way that Hyunjin wasn’t, and it made Ryujin’s heart swoon.

For a second, Ryujin thinks about calling Hyunjin out to embarrass her for the tireless pining looks.

But she stops herself, in fear that doing so would... somehow push Heejin and Hyunjin together.

So Ryujin keeps her mouth shut. Because just like Hyunjin, she couldn’t help but feel soft looking at the girl in ridiculous skater outfits too.

But lately, something had changed. Sometimes, when Heejin thought no one would notice, she looked at Hyunjin the same way Hyunjin looked at her.

Ryujin noticed, though.

“No really, I think like she’s starting to like me!” Hyunjin chirps optimistically.

The sun was going down as the girls were wrapping up at their soccer practice, the breeze soothing their tired bodies. Ryujin and Hyunjin are leading the cool down stretch at the center of the Dalla High field, as team captains usually do.

“She sounds like she hates you.” Ryujin says, reaching over to her right foot.

“No, she’s just an emo middle schooler. She pretends to hate everyone.” Hyunjin says, stopping her stretching. “But I will GET HER TO LIKE ME BEFORE I STOP BABYSITTING HER THIS YEAR!” she insists passionately.

“She’s a filthy rich pre-teen in Beverly Hills. I don’t think she needs to like her babysitter.” Ryujin says, suddenly looking at Hyunjin quizzically. “How did you even find that job in the first place anyway? Hyejoo Ha is literally like, the wealthiest kid in the world.”

“I used the dark web to find the craigslist for rich people.” Hyunjin responds nonchalantly.

“What? How did you even find that? I once watched you slam your laptop into a wall because you didn’t know which tab the music was coming from, so I know you’re not good with computers.” Ryujin questions.

“IT DIDN’T HAVE THE SPEAKER ICON ANYWHERE!” Hyunjin shouts back.

“HYUNJIN! YOU CAN STRETCH AND TALK, IT’S NOT HARD!” Coach Krystal yells from the sideline where she was putting away practice jerseys.

She sends the ‘OK’ hand sign back at the woman and stretches out to her left foot. However she turns to Ryujin again, a little quieter this time.

“Anyway. I swear I *will* get Hyejoo to like me and we will have a heartwarming relationship you’ll be jealous of. She’ll see me as the sister she doesn’t have.”

“Didn’t she set your hair on fire once?” Ryujin asks.

“Yeah and it was the only mutual interaction we’ve ever had so far! I’ll cherish it forever.” Hyunjin smiles with a fond sigh.

“We’re good, team!” Ryujin says, standing and helping Hyunjin up with one hand.

The group of girls gather around them for their final huddle.

“Alright everyone. Rest up because we have a game tomorrow against CLC Prep!” She jumps a little at the thought. “Night guys.” Hyunjin says, breaking the girls out on 3. The team leaves the huddle and grab their bags, leaving the field in cliques.

As Hyunjin and Ryujin walk off the field together, the cheerleading team walks on, ready to start their own practice. One of the cheerleaders bumps slyly into Hyunjin on her way.

“Oh sorry Hyunjin, I didn’t see you.” She says with a growing smirk on her face.

“Oh look! It’s everyone’s favorite street whore.” Ryujin says, a fake smile plastered on her face.

Lia tilts her head slightly to glare at Ryujin, her high ponytail swooshing in the process. Without saying a word, the girl turns her attention back to Hyunjin, her dreamy pink eye makeup shimmering under the bright field lights.

“Seriously, I didn’t see you!” Lia says, biting her bottom lip slightly, making no effort to hide the fact that she was checking Hyunjin out. The soccer player’s ears turned red, but she moves along regardless, a bright smile on her face.

“It’s cool! Haha... See you around.” Hyunjin says, clearly ignoring the girl’s advances. Hyunjin begins walking away, leaving a disappointed Lia sighing.

Ryujin shrugs. “Don’t worry Lia, I’m sure if you try again a hundred more times it actually might work! What’s that called again? Insanity?” she jokes sarcastically.

Lia rolls her eyes at Ryujin’s mockery, flips her hair in the soccer player’s face, and struts away. Ryujin spends a second trying to get the hair out of her mouth before she chases after Hyunjin, who is already halfway across the chilly parking lot.

When Ryujin catches up to the girl, she nudges her harshly.

“That’s the fifth time Lia has accidentally bumped into you. I’m counting because that’s also how many times you’ve blatantly rejected the captain of the cheerleading team.” Ryujin says, snickering at her friend. “Tell me again why that is?”

Hyunjin kicks a pebble on the blacktop, smiling at the ground, then back at Ryujin. “You hate her! Why do you care?” Hyunjin asks, trying her best to deflect.

“Because had you talked to her the first time, you’d be dating a cheerleader by now! And that gives me a lot of popularity cred as your best friend.” Ryujin responds before being shoved by Hyunjin. The other girl exaggerates the pain of the blow but then stops and looks at her friend. “But also... You *are* always complaining about not having a girlfriend...”

Hyunjin scoffs, but her smile wavers.

Hyunjin was never really complaining about not having just any girlfriend. She was complaining about not having the guts to make a specific someone her girlfriend.

Not that Ryujin would know that.

After a long pause of Ryujin looking at her expectantly, she lies. “She’s just not my type, I don’t know.” As if Hyunjin didn’t know exactly why she refuses to reciprocate any of Lia’s flirting.

Ryujin knew though - and it frustrated her *immensely* that Hyunjin wouldn’t say it out loud.

But then again, did she really want her to?

It was already hard enough pretending she didn’t notice how sweetly and longingly Hyunjin looked at Heejin. Plus, Ryujin really couldn’t be one to judge. It’s not like she was going to tell Hyunjin that she wasn’t the only one who had feelings for their mutual friend anytime soon either.

So, Ryujin keeps up the front.

“Bullshit! She’s annoying, I’ll give you that, but you don’t think anyone is annoying so I don’t see the problem.” Ryujin puts an arm on Hyunjin’s shoulder, wriggling her eyebrows. “Realistically, she’s gorgeous and she obviously wants you to talk to her.”

Hyunjin, pushes Ryujin off of her. “Well there’s a flaw in your theory because I think you’re pretty annoying, so.”

Ryujin smiles, shoving Hyunjin roughly but playfully.

“Whatever, you love me.” She says, walking up to her silver 2008 Ford Taurus and unlocking it. Both girls throw their bags in the trunk and get into the comfortable front seats.

Hyunjin controls the aux as Ryujin drives, the streetlights entering and leaving the car as they go. The windows are down, allowing for a warm end of summer breeze to enter the vehicle.

Hyunjin loves moments like these. Where she can feel the weight of school, parents, and responsibilities blow off her shoulders by the Southern California wind and into the evening sky.

The little car comes to a halt when they reach their quaint little neighborhood. Ryujin parks between two houses and the girls get out, each grabbing their own bags.

“Hey, don’t be late tomorrow. I know we’re supposed to look nice on game days, but last time you almost cost us playing time taking selfies to show off your earrings.” Ryujin says as she walks to the house on the left side of the car.

“Yeah, and I should’ve been in a COMMERCIAL because of how good they looked. But God had other plans for me, so I had to document it somehow...” Hyunjin says. Ryujin chuckles, then locks her car and paces to her own front door bags in hand.

“Night Hyun!” Ryujin screams from across her lawn.

“Night,” Hyunjin says, running up the stairs of the house on the right.

Both girls enter their adjacent homes, as they do every night after a hard day of practice.

“Are you wearing heels?” asks Siyeon, a member of the soccer team.

Hyunjin has just walked into school, accompanied by Ryujin as usual. Kids bustle around them, talking to each other and carrying books to and from their respective lockers. Hyunjin is wearing a well-fitted black dress and of course, nice heels to match.

“That’s what I said.” Ryujin replies. She herself is dressed rather nicely, black pants and white turtleneck accompanied by a grey blazer.

Ryujin couldn’t lie though, her friend had cleaned up rather nicely.

“Yes. I think the height helps me breathe more naturally. Better air up here.” Hyunjin says, flipping her hair over her shoulder dramatically.

“You are three inches higher than normal, how could the air possibly change?”

“Damn, really killin’ it with the game day attire guys.” Bora, another team member, says from down the hall as she approaches them. She gets closer to Siyeon and cuddles into her. “You look the best though,” she says to her girlfriend.

“I hate gay people.” Ryujin says, faking a gag. Siyeon flips her off.

“We have to go to class, but for real you guys look great!” Bora says, dragging Siyeon down the hallway.

Ryujin turns back to Hyunjin and pokes at one of her earrings. Hyunjin swats her away.

“YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT THE ‘RINGS!” She shrieks, and Ryujin laughs.

“Okay your majesty, jeez. I’ll see you at lunch.” Ryujin walks away from her and disappears in a crowd of kids.

It had been a choice this morning - to dress up a little bit nicer than usual. Hyunjin didn’t mind reigning in some attention from time to time. Especially if it was the attention of the only girl

whose opinion she cared about. Speaking of, she hadn't seen Heejin around anywhere yet.

"Wow," a familiar deep voice from behind breaks Hyunjin's train of thought.

Or so she thought!

Startled, Hyunjin jumps and spins around to see Heejin gazing over her. She has on an oversized white hoodie with a beanie to match. She's wearing circular wire-rimmed glasses that make her look cuter than usual, and Hyunjin's heart can't help but swoosh.

"What?" Hyunjin says, moving a strand of hair behind her ear.

"You look really good." Heejin says, her cheeks flushing a little from the unfamiliar feeling she's getting from seeing her best friend like this. It's not like Heejin hasn't seen her dressed up before... but lately, Heejin's found herself seeing Hyunjin in a different light.

"Oh. Thanks. I'm wearing heels." Hyunjin says awkwardly, causing the other girl to giggle.

"I can see that. You're taller than me now." Heejin jokes playfully.

"I'm always taller than you." the dolled-up soccer player responds, bumping into Heejin lightly with a smile on her face.

"Wow okay no need to brag." Heejin says, her hands up in surrender. "Come on, let's get to first period before you insult my height again."

"Oh, I still have the entire walk there, you're not free yet." Hyunjin teases.

Both girls laugh with each other as they make their way to their classes, butterflies threatening to escape their stomachs as they walk down the hall.

The clock on the giant blue scoreboard winds down to the final seconds.

The night is cool and breezy as cheers roar from the stands as Dalla High's pride and joy, the girls soccer team, faces off in an intense match against CLC Prep.

The cheer squad is on the track, hyping up the crowd. "DAL-LA, DAL-LA YEAH!"

Heejin watches both of her best friends from her regular spot, front and center of the bleachers. "LET'S GO RYUJIN!" she shouts when seeing Ryujin obtain the ball, snuggling herself into a light blanket as she munches on some Hot Cheetos.

Ryunjin dribbles the ball through defenders left and right, but can't seem to shake them. The chances of Dalla High winning are slim, no matter how many players she breaks through, there always seems to be another one blocking her path.

In the corner of her eye, she sees Hyunjin zip down the sideline. With a swift kick, Ryujin sends the ball her way.

Hyunjin races to the ball, another defender trying to beat her to it. Hyunjin puts on the gas, zooming towards the ball as fast as she can. She wins the battle, leaving it to only her and the goalie now.

Hyunjin takes her shot at the upper left hand corner, praying the goalie misreads her aim.

The goalie reaches in the accurate direction, not being fooled, but the ball is just too far out of reach! It hits the back of the net with a woosh.

The crowd roars, and Ryuji and the other teammates run to engulf Hyunjin in a victory hug.

“You guys ready to go get dinner? Also that *shot*? Kind of insane.”

Hyunjin and Ryuji look over at Heejin walking towards them, her blanket drooping over her head. The players are putting their warm ups back on and slipping their feet in comfortable slides. Ryuji stands to greet her while Hyunjin continues to stare in a daze from just how adorable Heejin looks.

“Don’t forget who assisted the shot though!” Ryuji says, smiling warmly at Heejin.

“Obviously. You both were amazing tonight.” Heejin looks down at Hyunjin and winks.

Hyunjin tries to hide a blush and stands up to walk over to her friends when she is cut off mid step by Lia.

“SERIOUSLY! She’s right you guys were so great!” Lia says, hair perfectly done and her cheering uniform covered by a big cheer jacket, even though it definitely wasn’t cold enough for it.

“Oh here we go.” Ryuji chuckles and Hyunjin elbows her.

“Lia! Thanks!” Hyunjin says, keeping a smile on her face.

Heejin looks between the two girls, suddenly a little unnerved. She had heard stories of Lia “bumping” into Hyunjin before, but this was the first time she had seen it with her own eyes.

Heejin decides that she doesn’t like it one bit.

“Since when do you guys cheer for soccer?” Heejin asks, raising an eyebrow. Lia just giggles.

“Oh, we totally weren’t going to, but the girls *totally* agreed that you guys deserve it! You’re waaaay better than the football team anyway.” Lia says, not taking her eyes off Hyunjin the entire time she spoke.

Hyunjin shifts awkwardly looking desperately at Ryuji who is channeling all of her willpower as to not laugh. Heejin can feel herself tensing up just watching Lia’s eyes wander Hyunjin’s figure.

“That’s great! But we have to leave.” Heejin says, grabbing Hyunjin and Ryuji’s wrists and moving them towards the parking lot.

“Wait!” Lia says, getting a hold of Hyunjin’s shoulder and holding out a strip of paper. “Here’s my number. I realized you didn’t have it and that’s like, so crazy! I mean, we see each other like everyday.”

“Yeah because we go to the same school.” Ryuji snorts, but Hyunjin bumps her lightly. Lia glares at Ryuji, but then looks back at Hyunjin.

“Seriously, we should hang out some time though... Text me!” Lia says, shaking the paper a little so Hyunjin has no real choice but to take it.

Heejin wants to slap the paper out of Lia’s hand, but she restrains herself.

“Sure!” Hyunjin says, reaching out to take the number.

Lia lets her hand linger on Hyunjin’s way too obviously as they make the exchange. She smiles innocently and Hyunjin can’t help but turn pink.

Heejin rolls her eyes so hard that Ryujin thinks she might lose them in the back of her head. Ryujin almost mocks Heejin... Until she realizes-

Heejin is jealous.

“Sorry Juliet, I’m going to have to take Romeo here because like Heejin said, we really do need to leave. Bye.” Ryujin says, grabbing her friends and heading to their cars.

“It’s JuLIA but nice try!” Lia shouts from where she’s standing as the three best friends leave her behind.

As they walk, Heejin starts laughing and so do her two best friends by default.

“*Hyunjin! Hyunjin! You need my number! You’re so hot!*” Heejin mocks in a highly feminine tone, aggravated.

“Stop, she’s just being nice.” Hyunjin responds, genuinely feeling sorry for the girl.

Hyunjin smiles at Heejin as they walk though, slightly bumping her in a playful manner. When Heejin does it back, Ryujin finds herself clenching her jaw.

They approach the passengers side door of Ryujin’s car, Hyunjin on the opposite side of Heejin. “Plus I don’t think anyone thinks I’m hot.” Hyunjin says.

Heejin smiles then opens her mouth to say something.

“Hey, are we gonna eat or what?” Ryujin says before she can, irritation piercing through her voice from the driver’s side of the car. Before the other two can react to it though, a ping causes Ryujin to look at her phone.

“Shit.” Ryujin says, looking at the message.

“What? Is everything okay?” Heejin says, moving closer to Ryujin. The other girl looks up and is slightly flushed at their proximity. No one notices.

“Yeah it’s just... My dad. I forgot my grandparents were in town for my aunt’s birthday and I have to go to dinner with them. *Fuck*, I’m gonna be late. ” She says, shoving the phone back in her pocket.

“Oh, I guess I’ll just go home with you instead then. That’s cool, we can just get drive through.” Hyunjin says, getting ready to open the door even though she’s a little disappointed.

“Wait, I’m starving. We can get something and then I can drop you off so Ryujin doesn’t have to worry about it.” Heejin offers, scratching the back of her neck.

Ryujin’s heart drops to the floor at the thought of them hanging out without her, but she says nothing in return.

“Oh.” Hyunjin blushes a bit. “Well I *am* really hungry.” Hyunjin says, looking between Ryujin and Heejin.

Ryujin is about to protest, when another ping comes out of her pocket. And another. And then another.

“Oh Jesus my dad’s flipping shit. Okay that’s fine, I gotta go. Sorry guys.” She says, opening the door to her car.

“We’ll fill you in tomorrow don’t worry. I’ll even bring you a dessert, asshole.” Hyunjin says, as Ryujin gets into her own car. Ryujin takes a breath and nods.

“Better be fucking amazing.” Ryujin says to Hyunjin through the open passenger window.

“When have we ever let you down?” Heejin says leaning down to the driver’s side and smiling at Ryujin. Ryujin can’t help but acknowledge the little details of the girl’s face. When her eyes start to wander to her lips, she catches herself and snaps out of it, clearing her throat.

“Just don’t give me food poisoning.” She says, making both of her friends laugh. With that, she backs out of the parking lot and heads out of the parking lot and down the street.

Hyunjin and Heejin are left standing alone on the gravel watching Ryujin’s car disappear into the distance. Heejin turns towards the other girl.

“So, where do you want to eat?”

“Didn’t she set you on fire?”

Heejin and Hyunjin had settled on a local diner for their after game location. The place was lit up with neon signs, giving it a retro feel.

“Okay we get it, Hyejoo Ha isn’t my biggest fan!” Hyunjin says exasperated. “But I swear on my LIFE, she will like me by the time she graduates from middle school.”

“Whatever you say.” Heejin says, a grin on her face.

Hyunjin gazes at Heejin, hard to not be in awe. The neon lights of the diner illuminate her face incredibly, fitting the girl’s face so that Hyunjin could see the outline of her jaw perfectly among the shadows. Heejin was art.

Speaking of art - “So how’s your art selling going?” Hyunjin asks.

She regrets it a little after the question comes out, seeing Heejin’s smile fall slightly.

“Not great. I mean. I’ve sold one to you and Ryujin but that’s it.” Heejin sighs. “My dad keeps asking me why I keep wasting my time and has offered to pay for them so I stop. Like that isn’t the whole reason I’m selling it in the first place.”

She sits back a little. Her father had never supported her artwork, and finds it pointless for her to do anything when he was wealthy enough to support her through life. But Heejin knew that being financially supported through life meant owing her family.

And well, she didn’t want to live with her parents forever.

Hyunjin gives Heejin an empathetic look, but Heejin just laughs hollowly. “I sound like such an entitled asshole. Getting bent out of shape because my parents want to give me money.”

Hyunjin takes a beat. “Maybe a little.”

Heejin smirks. “Wow!” They both laugh.

“But, you have reason to be.” Hyunjin says, and Heejin looks up at her.

“He just thinks money is the only way to support me. So if it takes selling my art to get the money I need instead of getting it from his wallet, then so be it.” Heejin takes a bite of her burger.

“Well you’re like wildly talented... So you’ll be out of stock in no time. Don’t worry about it.” Hyunjin says as Heejin’s eyes gleam up at her, sending Hyunjin for a loop. Heejin gasps.

“Oh my god, that reminds me, I didn’t tell you what Mrs. Tiffany said about my portrait assignment today!”

Hyunjin’s smile grows wider as the other girl explains her story passionately, trying her best not to seem over excited about her teacher’s reaction. At some point during the explanation, Hyunjin tunes out. Instead she’s admiring Heejin’s eyes and how the blue tint from the sign’s lights are reflecting off of them.

She had been noticing it more recently, just how beautiful Heejin was. She had always had a soft spot for the girl, but as they continued to be with each other at every turn, the more Hyunjin was starting to see her in a different light.

Hyunjin melts at how wonderfully Heejin complements her. Her calmness and artistic lifestyle always keeps Hyunjin grounded. She likes the way Heejin acts like she doesn’t care about her work, but talks about the feedback she’s given like it was the best thing she’s ever heard. She has the drive and fire to be completely independent, despite just being in high school. And the way her nose crinkles when she smiles...

“Is there something in my teeth? *Fuck*, I knew I shouldn’t have gotten lettuce with my burger.” Heejin starts aggressively rubbing at her teeth.

“NO! No...” Hyunjin says, slightly embarrassed that she had been staring at her best friend that long. She composes herself and musters up a little bit of courage. “I, um you just look different.”

Different? Heejin waits for a beat and looks at Hyunjin quizzically. She lets out a laugh.

“Okay I get it, I wear the same shit every day, and you’re being sarcastic. Whatever!” Heejin says, continuing to laugh. Hyunjin lets out a dry one in return.

“Yeah, got me!” Hyunjin says awkwardly, looking to the side and letting out a sigh.

“You’re one to talk though. That outfit today...” Heejin says. “That was definitely different.”

Hyunjin blushes for what feels like the thousandth time that night. She wonders how long the girl had been thinking about her outfit that day.

“Like... Good different?” Hyunjin asks.

“Like... You looked good before, and you still look good. I don’t know... Just different.” Heejin’s face flushes as she stutters at her own comment and she looks down at the table.

Hyunjin can feel her face going red, but tries to change the subject before Heejin can notice.

“Well, I definitely don’t look like that right now. I mean...” Hyunjin shakes her head a little to

emphasize the messy strands of hair coming out from all over her head.

“You still look good for playing like a monster in a really big soccer game.” Heejin responds.

More compliments on her appearance. Hyunjin begins to wonder if... This was Heejin flirting?

No. It can't be... Heejin was just hyping up a dear friend.

“Okay, but I bet I could play better if this wasn't in my face the entire time.” Hyunjin says, trying and failing to move the hair to the side.

“Shave it off.” Heejin says.

“Bye.” Hyunjin retorts, becoming genuinely frustrated with the hair not leaving her eyesight.

“Okay, before you start pulling it out.” Heejin says, rising from her seat across the booth and moving to sit next to Hyunjin.

Heejin takes the strands of hair and gently tucks them away into Hyunjin's ponytail. It was only when Hyunjin could feel the warmth radiating off of Heejin that she realized how close their faces were.

“There...” Heejin trails off now that she's making eye contact with the other girl. She looks down Heejin's face, her eyes a little dazed. They are definitely much closer than they have ever been before.

“You guys are a really cute couple!” An unknown voice says at their side.

Hyunjin practically flies away from Heejin when the waitress picks up the bill.

A feeling of terror runs through Hyunjin's stomach at her calling them a couple. Not that she was scared of people thinking they were a couple, but instead she was afraid that Heejin might be weirded out.

(Hyunjin wasn't exactly the most normal girl and she knew it. Why would anyone like her like that? Especially someone like Heejin.)

“WE AREN'T DATING!” Hyunjin responds very loudly and very quickly. The whole place is looking at them now. (If Hyunjin didn't know any better, she'd think she saw Heejin's shoulders slump.)

“Yup, just friends!” The smaller girl says, a hint of disappointment in her voice that Hyunjin doesn't seem to pick up on. “Um, we should probably head home now right!”

“Right!” Hyunjin says, gathering her belongings and walking towards the counter, not even bothering to see the clear look of sadness on Heejin's face.

After an agonizingly awkward, *very long* drive from the diner with Heejin, Hyunjin had decided to take the weekend to herself. Hyunjin wouldn't even let her co-captain come over, no matter how persistent the girl was.

She just couldn't deal with other people. She had way too much on her mind.

Correction: way too much of one person on her mind.

Ever since she had come home from their little dinner, Hyunjin was having problems getting Heejin out of her head. It was so bad that she couldn't have a nights rest without dreaming of her being face to face with Heejin in the diner.

All she could think about was how close Heejin had gotten.

And how for a second she thought that she saw Heejin's eyes look at her lips.

Honestly, Hyunjin had been playing it on a loop in her brain all weekend, and she had no idea how to talk to her friends, so she was keeping her responses in their group chat to a minimum. If they didn't know something was off, maybe she would just forget about feeling... whatever she was feeling, and things could get back to normal.

Except things *weren't* normal. Hyunjin tried to distract herself with TV, movies, music, she even picked up a fucking book for christsake. But somehow, her stupid brain connected whatever she was doing to Heejin in some way or another, and it was driving the girl insane. She felt like a helpless lovesick puppy.

Now it was Monday, and Hyunjin, of course, had to go to school.

And see Heejin.

Hyunjin looked in the mirror one last time before picking up her backpack and heading out her front door.

"Hey furry!"

Ryujin immediately messes up Hyunjin's hair when she gets into her car.

"I *told* you, I am NOT a furry." Hyunjin says, pushing Ryujin's arms out of her face, attempting to fix her now very messy hair.

"You're the one who wears a tail sometimes." Ryujin points out.

"FOR ARTISTIC REASONS." Hyunjin says, getting worked up at the matter. She just liked taking a walk in the animal's shoes to understand their struggles. She doesn't know how no one else understands.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, you like to 'take a walk in the animals' shoes' blah blah, you're still the one out here wearing a tail." Ryujin says, putting the car in drive and making a turn.

Hyunjin huffs. "Okay well I haven't even worn it this month, so!"

"Well how do I know you didn't wear it this weekend?" Ryujin asks, looking at her friend for a reaction. Obviously, she doesn't get one. "Bitch, you were being so short with us in the chat. Are you good?"

This weekend. I didn't see Ryujin this weekend. I didn't see Heejin this weekend either. She didn't see me. If she did see me it would've been with her eyes. Heejin's eyes are so pretty.

"HelloOOOooOo?"

"Hmm?" Hyunjin says, snapping back to reality. She has *got* to stop doing that.

“Jesus, did you get a concussion or something? Do I need to tell coach because honestly... We play Mina’s Presidential Academy this week and without you they’ll put in some replacement JV forward, but with our JV team, they might as well have Bora being a forward on her own and I don’t think she can do that-”

“I’M PERFECTLY FINE!” Hyunjin screams cutting her off. She takes a minute to think about what Ryujin just said. “Also you’re a dick.”

“I’m *kidding* obviously, I wouldn’t want you to play if you were concussed, what kind of friend do you think I am?” Ryujin says, shaking her head. Her smile wavers. “But seriously you sure you’re okay? Heejin was stressed about you too.”

“Yeah.” Hyunjin responds. “Like I said, I’m fine!”

Heejin. HeejinHeejinHeejinHeejinHeejin

“Perfectly fine.”

“You’ve got some explaining to do!”

Hyunjin nearly goes into cardiac arrest when Heejin shows up at her locker before first period.

“Okay, jumpy much?” Heejin says, biting her lip gently as she smiles. “What’s up with you? You’ve been acting weird all weekend.”

Hyunjin’s eyes widen at the question, her cheeks threatening to flush as she looks at the other girl. She couldn’t really tell her that she had been wondering what it would be like to kiss her for three days straight.

“Um-” Hyunjin starts, but drops all of her books on the floor. “Oh for fucks sake.”

“Jesus, how many books are you taking to first period?” Heejin asks, getting down to help Hyunjin recover her belongings that were now all over the ground.

Hyunjin notices Heejin’s slightly exposed shoulder peeking out from her jean jacket and immediately slams her eyes closed.

“Did your eyes get dry or something?” Heejin attempts to joke, trying her best to read Hyunjin. “Seriously why the books?” She asks, her head tilted at her friend.

Hyunjin opens her eyes and gulps. She couldn’t exactly tell Heejin that she was trying to avoid as many trips to her locker as possible, seeing as to how Heejin’s own locker was within a very close proximity.

“Just. Last minute homework for other classes, you know.” Hyunjin responds, attempting to be nonchalant.

Heejin hesitates, but accepts the excuse regardless. Hyunjin was acting weird, but if she wanted to tell her, Heejin figured she would let her know when she was ready. Or at least, she really *really* hoped that was the case.

Heejin reaches for the last book, but Hyunjin does as well. Their hands lay on each other’s and Heejin takes a little too long to pull away. Actually, Heejin doesn’t pull away at all, it’s Hyunjin

who takes her book back into her chest rapidly.

“HA! HA... WE SHOULD GET TO CLASS! Let’s do that! Come on can’t be late!”

With that, Hyunjin runs to the classroom, Heejin left in confusion to trail right behind her.

It hadn’t really gotten any better.

Hyunjin had been trying to act as normal as possible for two weeks now, but honestly, it was not easy.

Realizing you have feelings for your best friend is hard enough, but when your best friend is Heejin, well... It was hard not to stare at her even when you didn’t have feelings.

Take today for example. They were currently at lunch and Heejin was wearing a well fitted crop top with a leather jacket and ripped jeans. Her hair was flowing over her shoulders, glossy as if she had just walked out of a Pantene commercial. On top of that, Heejin was getting over a cold that made her voice slightly deeper than usual and it was kind of making Hyunjin’s head spin.

“So my dog fucking ate the canvas,” Heejin was saying, running her hands through her hair and ***God, why was she doing that?***

“And my dad was like ‘I can just buy you Andy Warhol’s stuff from a museum so you don’t have to paint it.’ I mean seriously?”

Ryujin shook her head in disgust, except instead of mockery, it was truly genuine. “That’s so shitty.” She rubs Heejin’s shoulder.

Ryujin hadn’t really gotten over her own feelings for the girl within the past weeks either. In fact, her feelings for Heejin had only gotten stronger. She *was* concerned for Hyunjin, but with her being M.I.A. most of the time, she and Heejin had been hanging out alone a lot more often.

Even though Heejin mainly talked to her about her worry for Hyunjin, it was still an opening for Ryujin to get closer to her. It progressively got easier to express herself in a more delicate manner rather than just cracking jokes. She had actually been trying her hand at acting romantic towards her since the night she couldn’t make it to the diner.

If she was being honest, she felt like she had clearly missed out on something huge for Hyunjin to be acting like a maniac, (well, more so than usual) and it really bugged her that neither of the girls would say anything about it. Even so, she tried to remain positive.

However, with Hyunjin ogling Heejin every chance she got, it was nearly impossible not to be ticked off all the time.

“Yeah. I mean he’s offering money again instead of just letting me paint, how fucking hard is it. To let me do something I’m proud of.” Heejin sends a thankful smile to Ryujin. Heejin sighs. “Well what about you Hyunjin? Anything-”

“HYUNJINNN!” Lia approaches the table, and Heejin immediately groans. Ryujin feels like she’s going to pull her eyes out of her sockets at the sound of Heejin’s annoyance.

Hyun had been keeping her interactions with Heejin at a minimum for weeks and yet she’s STILL acting jealous?

“Lia! Hi!!” Hyunjin says relieved, greeting the other girl enthusiastically, finally finding a reason to not stare at Heejin.

“I just wanted to say good luck at your game today, I know you’re going to score that net.” She smiles, allowing her hand to draw circles on Hyunjin’s shoulder.

Heejin’s eye is practically twitching.

“Thanks! I really appreciate it.” She says, letting her eyes wander down to where Lia’s hand is, but not stopping her.

“Hi Lia.” Heejin says, making Lia break eye contact with Hyunjin for a second.

“Oh Hi *Helen!*” Lia says, waving at Heejin one finger at a time. “Oh my god, I didn’t know you had such a low register! Come through Batman!”

Heejin’s jaw clenches, but Ryujin interjects before the smaller girl gets the chance at responding.

“Well Lia, it was great seeing you by force, but we’re full all of a sudden and need to be literally anywhere else!”

Ryujin stands, pulling Heejin along with her. She stops to look back at Hyunjin who is still sitting at the table. She raises her eyebrows. “Hyunjin?”

Hyunjin looks at Heejin, who’s full outfit is now exposed from behind the table.

“Uh... Go ahead! I’ll just stay and talk with Lia for a little bit maybe I’ll catch you by the next class, maybe not, who knows! Time is WILD!” Hyunjin finishes awkwardly as Heejin’s heart unknowingly sinks.

Heejin rolls her eyes and heads out of the cafeteria on her own. Ryujin watches her leave and then turns to Hyunjin, a look of complete and utter bafflement covering her face. She slowly shakes her head and turns back around to follow Heejin.

“I *knew* I would get you to talk to me eventually!” Lia smiles and plops down in Heejin’s empty seat.

Hyunjin has no idea what she had just done, but at least it was getting her mind off of her crush for a minute.

Lia looks at Hyunjin’s tray and gasps dramatically. “You have a plastic bottle? That’s like... So bad for the environment! Recently I’ve gone like, totally green though so don’t worry I have the solution!”

Lia pulls out a Hydroflask from her bag and hands it over to Hyunjin.

“It’s perfect for you! I’ve been handing them out all day! It does so many things...”

Lia continues listing off all of the things that the Hydroflask definitely does not do, like biodegrade, and Hyunjin sits in silence wondering if this was going to be what her life was going to be like if she never admitted her feelings to anyone.

Lia.

An empty lunch table.

And a Hydroflask.

When Lia says she has to leave the cafeteria for her next class, Hyunjin pretends to be disappointed. She nods in understanding and Lia gives her a kiss on the cheek, reminding her to send her a text. Hyunjin waits until the girl is far gone before breathing a sigh of relief.

Lia had kept Hyunjin in there for a majority of their meal, and now there was only a few seconds before the bell would ring.

No time for talking in the hallway, or seeing a particular girl that never really even left her brain, even while being bombarded with environmentally friendly tips by Lia.

Hyunjin was finally walking outside of the cafeteria when someone decided to pull her into the girls' restroom.

"FIRE!" Hyunjin screams instinctively.

"Shut up!" Ryujin whispers, glaring Hyunjin down, but letting her arm go.

"Ryujin? You could've KILLED me!" Hyunjin says, reaching for her chest.

Ryujin lets her eyelids and eyebrows droop slightly as if to say '*Really?*' without actually saying it.

"Okay so maybe I'm exaggerating but you scared the shit out of me, you're lucky I didn't swing." Hyunjin says, rubbing her arm where Ryujin had tugged.

"Wow, I'm so scared." Ryujin says in a monotone voice.

Ryujin waits expectantly, arms crossed, but Hyunjin says nothing. They both stand in silence for a beat.

"Am I supposed to say something?" Hyunjin asks.

"Seriously?" Ryujin says, throwing her arms down. "What the fuck are you on? The past week you've been acting so *weird*. I mean you're always weird, but Jesus, it's like the time you had to fake lose to that dude in arm wrestling. Except this is way worse."

"I was way stronger than him, but the team would get free pizza..." Hyunjin trails off, remembering her trauma. Ryujin snaps her fingers in front of her.

"Hey! Seriously what is going on with you? Normally I would just watch this play out and make fun of you for it later, but for some reason, Heejin is really upset..." Ryujin trails off this time.

Hyunjin's thoughts start moving a hundred miles a minute. Heejin was...upset?

"...Really?" Hyunjin asks, suddenly a lot quieter than before.

Ryujin sighs. When she and Heejin had left the cafeteria earlier, Heejin didn't even spare a glance at Ryujin. The taller girl had tried her best to comfort the other, but Heejin insisted that she was fine and wanted to head to her class early instead.

Obviously, Ryujin cared about Hyunjin's well being. But the girl usually just bounced back from things like this within a couple days and everything was fine. Ryujin was ready to let whatever this was run its course, but now that it was affecting the girl she had feelings for...

That they *both* had feelings for...

“Well... She wasn’t... I mean she wasn’t happy. But neither was I! You ditched us for Paris Hilton the third in the cafeteria! Honestly, ever since the night I couldn’t go to the diner...”

Hyunjin sways awkwardly. She bites the inside of her cheek as if she’s trying to keep her mouth shut.

Ryujin is losing her patience, so much so, that she asks the question she’s been dreading to ask for a long time.

“Did something happen with you guys at the diner?”

Hyunjin’s eyes go wide. “No! No... Well I mean... Not like that.”

Not like that. *What the hell does that even mean?* Ryujin felt like she was losing her mind.

“Then like what?” Ryujin questions.

Hyunjin shakes her leg thinking, before finally sighing.

“Something did happen. I realized... well at least I think I realized, I don’t know, this is so confusing honestly I have never been more stressed out in my life and you *know* about the time when I had to cut bread out of my diet for a week-”

“Hyunjin.” Ryujin places her hands on the girl’s shoulders. “What did you realize.”

Hyunjin looks in the girl’s eyes for the first time while they had been in the bathroom.

“I... I think I might have feelings for Heejin.”

Ryujin blinks, suddenly remembering why she had never asked Hyunjin about her very painfully obvious feelings. The gears in her brain start turning. She had already known this information, but now Hyunjin knew that she knew.

So how was Ryujin supposed to have a happy ending when her best friend was in love with the same girl that she was?

“Oh.” Ryujin lets out.

“Oh?” Hyunjin asks, trying to read the girl’s face.

“Um. I don’t know. I just didn’t-”

“I know it’s like sudden right?” Hyunjin says. “I don’t know, we were just at the restaurant and we got really close and I have no idea what happened but it was like. It clicked you know?”

Oh, Ryujin knew.

Because she had had her own moment with Heejin where it just clicked. Far before the day of the diner though.

“Sure. Sorry, I just uhhh was caught off guard. This is crazy.” Ryujin says, trying her best not to make the inside of the cheek bleed.

Hyunjin lets out a sigh. “Yeah.”

Hyunjin actually feels 10 pounds lighter. Like the secret was a weight that was pulling her under and making her suffocate for weeks on end. But now it was like all that had been cut off, and she could finally pull herself above the surface.

“But you know what? I think telling you actually helped. I’ve just been so nervous keeping it to myself. Now that you know though, I think I’ll be able to work through it. Thanks for getting it out of me Ryu.” Hyunjin offers an endearing closed mouth smile.

Ryujin takes a second to send one back, even though her teeth grind in the process.

“Anytime.”

If Ryujin could take back ever asking Hyunjin about her feelings for Heejin, she would do it in a heartbeat.

Two weeks had passed since the confession in the bathroom. That means two weeks had passed since Hyunjin delivered some ridiculous and elaborate excuse to Heejin for acting so distant.

“I thought the doctor’s note said I had ebola... But it said seasonal allergies. Doctor’s handwriting!”

Ryujin had no idea why Heejin had bought that, but she did.

Ever since, Heejin and Hyunjin had gone back to being inseparable, and Ryujin went back to feeling like a third wheel. Even when she had Heejin’s attention, Hyunjin would always join at the worst possible moment and it was like Ryujin didn’t even exist.

Except it was worse, because instead of panicking in real time with Heejin, Hyunjin somehow became smoother with flirting, and only panicked to Ryujin in secret. And Ryujin, of course, didn’t know what to do other than help her through it.

So basically, Ryujin was living in her own personal hell.

“So you in?”

Ryujin snaps out of her thoughts and looked over to Heejin who had just spoken to her from the other side of the cafeteria table.

“Huh?”

Hyunjin giggles from next to Heejin and the smaller girl smirks.

“I said, do you want to get breakfast together before school tomorrow?”

Ryujin nods and Heejin smiles. “Cool, ‘cause I’ve been craving pancakes.”

“Me too.” Ryujin and Hyunjin both say at the same time. Hyunjin starts laughing, and Ryujin follows awkwardly.

“Oh guys I sold more of my artwork!” Heejin says grinning. “Only a couple more until I have half of what I need for the new pair of converse I want.”

Ryujin takes a bite of her cold school pizza. “I still don’t get why you don’t just get a job. It’d be so much easier to save up for stuff.”

Heejin squints her eyes. “That’s not the point.”

“Yeah, she’s trying to prove to her dad that her art isn’t a waste of time.” Hyunjin chimes in.

Obnoxiously , Ryujin might add.

“I’m just saying is all. Trying to make it easier on you. You have a car already.”

“That my dad bought!” Heejin replies.

“But you use it.” Ryujin says flinging a pea off her tray at Heejin. The victim crinkles her nose.

“And you can drive it to work. I heard Heart Shakers is hiring,” Ryujin says, referring to the pizza parlor downtown.

Heejin tuts. “Whatever, I see your point but I’m trying to prove one myself.”

Heejin grabs a cookie covered in frosting off her tray and takes a bite. She munches away, not noticing the frosting left on her nose. Ryujin smiles at the adorableness of it all.

Until Hyunjin extends her arm out.

“You missed something.” Hyunjin says, wiping the frosting off her friend’s nose and then eating it herself.

Ryujin wants to barf all over the lunch table.

Heejin blushes and continues chewing her cookie, stealing glances from Hyunjin when she isn’t looking. Hyunjin does the same, and is even offered a bite of the desert which she gladly takes straight from the other girl’s hand.

All the while Ryujin can feel her heart plummeting into the Earth’s core, watching the exchanges.

She had never wanted lunch to end so badly before in her life.

Hyunjin was jogging her usual path as the sun went down. She wouldn’t say she loved running, but her parents insisted that she do it as much as possible. Something about her having “the energy of a 4 year old on drugs” all the time and “needing something to tire her out a little.”

Hyunjin didn’t mind though. It kept her in shape for soccer and something about the colors of the evening sky always put her at ease.

Except sometimes, she would look at it for too long and then accidentally look into the sun, which is what she was doing right now.

“FUCK!” Hyunjin screams, stopping mid jog to peel her eyes away from the light. She’s rubbing at her eyeballs so hard that she almost doesn’t see the glossy blue 1967 Chevy Impala pulling up to where she’s crouching.

“Did you look into the sun again?”

Hyunjin looks up squinting to see Heejin getting out of her car after parking it on the side of the road.

“Maybe...” Hyunjin says, trying to keep her eyes open.

Heejin laughs, looking at her friend adoringly. Something about Hyunjin's goofiness just made Heejin's heart flutter.

Heejin realizes that this was the first time they had been alone since that night after the game all those weeks ago.

"Hey I was gonna go to see a movie, did you want to come?" She asks.

"You were going to go see a movie by yourself?" Hyunjin responds.

"Well no. I just, you know, figured since I ran into you... We could like... See a movie." Heejin offers.

Hyunjin doesn't know how to take that response. She was almost sure that Heejin seemed a little off, almost like she was nervous. Hyunjin tries not to think much of it though, and takes a deep breath, shrugging.

"I'm down to see a movie." Hyunjin says, but she looks down at her sweaty shirt. "Maybe I should change first?"

Heejin's face lights up. "I have some extra clothes in my trunk I think. Come on." She grabs Hyunjin's hand bringing her towards the car.

Heejin finds an oversized *Stüssy* shirt in her trunk and tosses it to Hyunjin.

"Thanks." Hyunjin says, changing into the shirt immediately, not even waiting for the other girl to turn around.

Heejin goes red. "Um." She spins around quickly, avoiding eye contact. *Had Hyunjin always been that fit?*

Hyunjin freezes in realization of what she's just done. "Oh god sorry, locker room habit."

"It's okay." Heejin says. "Ready?"

"Yeah!" Hyunjin says getting into the car, Heejin in the driver's seat.

"Do you want to play something?" Heejin asks, offering Hyunjin the aux connected to the modern radio installed in the old car.

Hyunjin grabs the cord and takes a minute to think about her song choice. She looks over at her friend.

Heejin has put the car in drive, both windows down, the gentle wind filling the car. Her hair is flowing softly and the sun is hitting her brown eyes, making them look like honey.

Hyunjin wonders why she never noticed how beautiful Heejin was earlier on in their friendship.

It makes her sad for some reason, thinking about all the time she's wasted not appreciating her magnificence.

But in retrospect, no time spent with Heejin was ever a waste - regardless of how Hyunjin may have seen her. They were unforgettable pieces in the giant puzzles of each other's lives. As much as Hyunjin had helped Heejin out of her shell every once in a while growing up, Heejin somehow always managed to return the favor. Of course Hyunjin was naturally outgoing, but the confidence she has now had to have been built from something.

After all, it was Heejin who had gotten her to try out for soccer in the third grade when she didn't know if she would be able to keep up.

"You're really good at kicking stuff. Everything else doesn't matter!"

It was Heejin who had held Hyunjin's hand when she got her first ear piercing on her eleventh birthday.

"You're going to be in so many commercials for earrings because of how cool they'll look. You'll be famous."

And it was Heejin who had encouraged her to come out to her parents in the summer after their sophomore year of high school.

"Tell you what. I'll do it too. And if we get kicked out, we can just live in my car together."

Heejin had truly been at the heart of all the biggest events in Hyunjin's lifetime.

It only made sense that she was the heart of this one too. Being Hyunjin's first real love.

It is love, Hyunjin thinks to herself. Maybe not romantically yet, but Hyunjin was sure they'd get there in no time. Because well... Hyunjin didn't really ever need anyone else.

Hyunjin looks back at her phone, suddenly knowing the perfect song to play.

She taps the phone screen a few times and the chords to *"Ribs"* by Lorde begins to play gloriously through Heejin's speakers.

"I love this song." Heejin says, smiling over at Hyunjin. Hyunjin looks and smiles back.

"Me too."

"The drink you spilled all over me," the car speakers sing between beats. *"'Lover's Spit' left on repeat. My mom and dad let me stay home,"*

'It drives you crazy, getting old.' Heejin mouths the words, smiling brightly as she feels Hyunjin's eyes on her.

"We can talk it so good," Heejin sings lowly,

"We can make it so divine," Hyunjin gathers the courage to sing.

" We can talk it good

How you wish it would

Be all the time."

Hyunjin feels the moment happening in front of her and she desperately latches on to every word to soak it all in, struggling as the stereo sings faster and faster. And as the sky reveals itself to be a shade of deep pink with the setting sun, Hyunjin feels like she's floating as the song continues on and they continue to sing.

"...This dream isn't feelin' sweet, we're reeling through the midnight streets. And I've never felt

more alone... It feels so scary getting old."

Hyunjin doesn't know much about art, but she recalls Heejin telling her about what inspires her one afternoon. Vivid dreams, blissful moments, natural beauty.

Entranced and looking at the girl she's enamored with now, feeling the old car's shaky bass pump through her veins - Hyunjin knows that if she were the artist, the beauty of this would be her inspiration.

"This dream isn't feelin' sweet we're reeling through the midnight streets and I've never felt more alone! It feels so scary getting old!"

The percussion increases, signalling the beginning of the bridge. The two high schoolers move their bodies around to dance, carefree as they drive through the city streets.

"I want 'em back! I want 'em back! The minds we had! The minds we had!"

They're giggling between words, Heejin only taking her eyes off Hyunjin to guide them safely on the road in front of them. They're screaming too, matching the desperation, matching the longing.

"It's not enough to feel the lack, I want it back, I WANT IT!"

"You're the only friend I need! Sharing beds like little kids!" both girls scream at the top of their lungs. They sing their hearts out, moving dramatically to the beat. Hyunjin pretends to hold a microphone and Heejin laughs whole-heartedly. ***"Laughing until our ribs get tough, but that will never be enough."***

The moment isn't even over, but Hyunjin already misses it.

" You're the only friend I need!

Sharing beds like little kids

and laughing until our ribs get tough,

But that will never be enough."

Hyunjin bows as the electric car performance comes to an end, the two girls shining under the sunset.

"I did not fall asleep!" Heejin nearly shrieks.

Hyunjin laughs, sitting up slightly to take a sip of her slushie. They had just gotten out of the movies and were laying on top of Heejin's car, alone in an empty gravel parking lot of a 7 Eleven.

"You absolutely did fall asleep. I'm sure of it." Hyunjin responds.

How could she not have been? Heejin's head had fallen on her shoulder in the middle of the screening, forcing Hyunjin to panic for a solid 5 minutes instead of paying attention to the plot.

"Mhm whatever you say." Heejin says, taking a powdered donut out of its wrapping and popping it into her mouth.

"You know when I wish I was sleeping though?" Heejin says, turning her head so she's facing Hyunjin.

Hyunjin decides to brave it and turns her head too. "When?"

"During the random ass kiss they threw in there." Heejin's nose crinkles. "Like what was the reason? Rey and Kylo had no romantic build up whatsoever."

Hyunjin giggles. "I agree."

"If I had written it, I would've given Rey the best love story ever. And it wouldn't be with a manipulative villain." Heejin says, looking up at the stars.

"Oh? And how would that go?" Hyunjin asks, still looking at Heejin.

Heejin thinks for a second. "It would be a girl first of all." She turns her entire body to face Hyunjin, leaning on one of her elbows to be slightly elevated. "And she would be Rey's friend from the start. She would help Rey in the moments that she really needed her in."

Heejin scoots a little closer, causing Hyunjin's heartbeat to speed up. They're so close now, Hyunjin feels goosebumps rise on her arms.

"She would be really funny. And Rey would think so too. Somewhere along the lines of Jedi training, or whatever, they start looking at each other in a different light."

Heejin leans down, hesitant, but closer now.

"They have to separate so Rey can do her thing against the bad guys. But when she comes back from saving the galaxy,"

Their faces were inches away from each other. Hyunjin is frozen, breath hitching.

"They would kiss."

Heejin looks down at Hyunjin's lips, and Hyunjin swears she's going to pass out.

If what Hyunjin thinks is happening was actually about to happen, everything would be different. Their friendship would be more, their daily lives never the same. Their group dynamic would be drastically changed.

Their group dynamic. *Would Ryujin be okay?* She hadn't even thought about it. And she had been talking about it with her this whole time just assuming?

Hyunjin pulls away from Heejin before either of them can close the gap.

"Um." Hyunjin says, awkwardly shifting up as Heejin's eyes open slowly to look up at her. "That's... That's great, that's a great story, you should send Star Wars a complaint."

Heejin just looks at her in confusion, utter disappointment written all over her face.

“Seriously it was good um. I should probably get home now my mom... is probably wondering where I am.”

Heejin knows Hyunjin is lying. She had seen the girl text her mom earlier to let her know she was with Heejin.

However, the girl's is too red with embarrassment that she would honestly rather be anywhere else. “Okay.” She says, avoiding eye contact.

With that, Heejin gets in the car, not saying another word.

Hyunjin's eyebrows burrow slightly in concern as she hops off the hood of the car. She thought talking to Ryujin before anything would be better than just springing up the fact that they had kissed. It would decrease any chance of making her best friend, *their* best friend, feel like a third wheel. She was doing the right thing.

Wasn't she?

Ryujin tries to open the back door of her home's patio, but it's stuck on the frame.

“Fuck.” She had just taken out the garbage and was just trying to go back inside. She pushes on it, only for it to make an obnoxious squeaky noise.

“Are you guys ever going to fix that door?”

Ryujin looks over at Hyunjin who is peeking through the home-separating gate to Ryujin's backyard. Ryujin rolls her eyes and sighs.

“You know my dad would rather die before using his money to fix something that's ‘not even broken if you push it a little.’ Ryujin says, sitting on the grass. “Why are you here?”

Hyunjin walks over to sit next to her. “I hung out with Heejin tonight.”

Ryujin visibly stiffens. Just what she needed, another story about how Hyunjin hit it off with the girl Ryujin was in love with.

“Okay?” Ryujin says, irritated.

“And I realized that I never asked you how you felt about it. Like if we were to ever like. You know, date.” Hyunjin says quietly.

Ryujin is shocked for a second. She never expected Hyunjin to ask her about this.

“What?” She responds.

“Well I just don't want you to feel left out or whatever.” Hyunjin says.

Ryujin grips the grass. Maybe it was the door not budging, or maybe it was the fact that they hadn't even invited her to hangout at wherever her friends were that night. But Ryujin really was not in the mood to be sappy over a question she should've been asked a long time ago.

“It's whatever.” Ryujin says, trying her best not to show her anger. It's not like Hyunjin was ever going to make a move with Heejin anyway.

“Are you sure? I just-”

“Hyunjin I said it’s fine.” Ryujin snaps, making Hyunjin recoil slightly.

Hyunjin looks at her friend who is looking back at her. “O-... Okay.” She says, scratching the back of her neck. “Well I was asking because I think... I’m going to ask her out.”

Ryujin nearly breaks her neck extending it out towards Hyunjin.

“What?!” She says, ripping grass out of the ground. She looks at her hands and dusts them off. “I mean, when?”

“Tomorrow. I’m going to ask her to meet me at the diner. Like on a date.” Hyunjin says, looking over for her friend’s approval. Ryujin just blinks.

“That’s great. I have to get this fucking door open so.” The girl stands up, walks over to the door and slams it, the loud squeaky noise sounding at a deafening level.

“Here let me help.” Hyunjin says, about to walk over to Ryujin.

“No, it’s fine just go home.” The girl beating the door says quickly. She feels the harshness in her own voice, and tries to simmer down. “Please. Just text me or something.”

Hyunjin looks between Ryujin and the door and just nods. “Okay, I will.”

Hyunjin exits the yard, leaving Ryujin to let all of her anger out on the poor backdoor.

Hyunjin paces her room back and forth reciting the lines in her head.

“Hey! Hey so Heejin um... Do you- *Would* you, like to go... On... UGH!” Hyunjin flops down onto her bed.

She had been thinking about what to say for the better part of 24 hours and was now debating on whether or not to even call the girl.

But if she didn’t call her now, there would be no chance at redeeming herself from last night’s mistake.

“Screw it.” Hyunjin says. She hits Heejin’s contact information and taps **CALL**.

“Oh god.” Hyunjin immediately panics as she hears the line ring. After a few times, Heejin picks up on the other end.

“Hello?”

Hyunjin sits up nervously. “Hey um... Heejin?”

“Yeah?”

Hyunjin bits her lip. It’s silent for a beat.

“Hyun?” Heejin questions.

“Yeah! Yeah um...” Hyunjin hesitates. Why was this so hard?

“If you’re calling to talk about last night-”

“NO!” Hyunjin basically screams into the phone. “No! Well, yes, but no I just...” she sighs. “I just wanted to see if you would meet up with me. At the diner. You know as like...”

“As like what?” Heejin says, somewhat hopeful on the other end.

Unfortunately, Hyunjin does not hear it that way. She hears, fear, terror even.

“Um, you know friends talking! About things...” Hyunjin finishes. She cringes, wanting to slap herself.

Heejin scoffs into the phone. It takes a minute for her to say anything.

“Hello?” Hyunjin asks.

“Of course. Yeah. Um. Yeah that’s fine.” Heejin says.

Hyunjin breathes a sigh of relief. “Okay! I’ll meet you at the diner at 7?” Hyunjin asks.

“Yeah. It’s... A plan.” She replies.

“Okay, see you tonight.” Hyunjin says.

The girls hang up and Hyunjin buries her face in her hands.

As friends? Hyunjin had never really asked anyone out before, but she was pretty sure that was not a sentence she was supposed to say while doing it.

The girl unlocks her phone and opens a thread with Ryujin.

Hyunjin: i messed up.

It takes only a few moments for Hyunjin to get a response.

Ryujin: what do u mean

Hyunjin: i told heejin we were only meeting as friends

Ryujin: oh

Ryujin: so ur not asking her out?

Hyunjin: well i think im just going to explain everything to her tonight

Ryujin: oh

Ryujin: good luck

Hyunjin closes the thread and opens Safari. Immediately, she googles ‘places to get flowers’.

She was going to make this right. She had to.

Ryujin was staring at her messages from Hyunjin.

So the girl had fucked up again.

Honestly, how many times was she going to do that? At this point she was just playing around with Heejin's feelings. The thought of Heejin being in distress over it made Ryujin both sad and angry.

Ryujin knew that if she was in Hyunjin's position, she would never put Heejin through that. She would tell her straight forward how much she liked her. And how much she wanted to be her girlfriend.

So why hadn't she?

Ryujin stopped and thought for a moment.

Really, why hadn't she told Heejin already? What was she scared of? Being rejected? Becoming an outsider in their friend group because of it? That was already a reality for her. What did she have to lose?

A friend maybe . A little voice in her head told her.

But the more Ryujin thought about it, the more she didn't care.

It simply wasn't enough to hold her back any longer.

She pulled out her phone and tapped the screen a few times. She held the phone up to her ear.

"Hey, Heejin?" Ryujin says. "Will you come over?"

Hyunjin gets to the diner at 6:45PM on the dot.

She has a small bouquet roses in one hand and a little plush bear in the other. The girl had driven around the city looking for the gifts to bring to the meet up. She figured if she brought both of these romantic objects, there was no way she could weasel out of confessing her feelings.

Plus Hyunjin's confidence had increased a little, considering her current look.

She was wearing a black skirt and a dark red crop top, accompanied by dark heels that clicked whenever she walked.

"Well you look stunning! Hot date?" The waitress says, approaching Hyunjin.

"I hope so yeah." Hyunjin says. "Two please."

The waitress grabs two menus and leads Hyunjin over to an empty booth. Hyunjin sets down the flowers and plushie and orders a water.

This was it.

It's 7:20PM when Hyunjin decides to call Heejin.

The line rings several times before Hyunjin was sent to voicemail.

"Hi you've reached Heejin, I can't get to the phone right now but leave a message and I'll call you"

back!

WEED! WEED! WEED!

HYUNJIN RYUJIN ST -" The voicemail cuts off and a beep sounds in Hyunjin's ear.

"Did you want to order something while you wait sweetheart?" The waitress asks.

Hyunjin shifts uncomfortably. "Um. No it's okay, I'm sure she's on her way."

The waitress nods, leaving Hyunjin to stare at the clock.

It's 8:07PM when Hyunjin decides to go home.

Heejin never shows up.

Hyunjin had tried to call her a few more times within the last half hour, but not one single answer had come Hyunjin's way.

Hyunjin gets up to exit the diner, covering her face with the plush bear to stop anyone from speaking to her. She was afraid the tears threatening to leak might flow out if anyone did.

How *fucking* embarrassing. Even if they weren't, Hyunjin felt as though everyone's eyes were on her, the girl who entered and left the diner all alone.

The knot in her throat is aching by the time she finally gets to the door.

She throws the bear and the flowers in the trashcan the second she steps outside.

Hyunjin pulls into the driveway of her house and takes the keys out of the engine. Her eyes are stained with the tears she had allowed to fall the second she was inside her car.

She had fucked up, and now Heejin hated her for it? So much that apparently, she would just abandon her on their plans.

She didn't know what to think. She had hoped that even if Heejin hadn't felt the same, that they could talk something out, but Heejin didn't even give her the chance.

Her heart felt heavy as she sat in silence in the dark. There was no way she could go inside and risk the constant interrogation from her parents as to why her eyes were so red.

She looks to her neighbor's house. Ryujin's room light is on, her car in the street but the girl's dad's car nowhere in sight.

Thank god . Hyunjin thinks. They were in a weird place yesterday, but at least she knew Ryujin would let her go over there and calm down before having to enter her own house.

Hyunjin opens the door to her car and steps out, wiping the tears from her face in the process. She makes her way over and up to the front door and rings the doorbell.

No answer.

Hyunjin rings the doorbell several more times, trying to get the girl's attention, but still nothing.

"Ugh." Hyunjin says, taking out her phone. She was about to call Ryujin when she heard a familiar squeak coming from the backyard.

Hyunjin sniffled, but tried to look over the fence. With a tree standing in her way, there was no luck in seeing who was at the backdoor.

Hyunjin steps down from where the front door is and walks over to the gate. She opens it cautiously.

"Ryujin?" She whispers, prepared to see a criminal or animal trying to break into her best friend's home.

What she sees is, in her eyes, infinitely worse.

Ryujin is cupping Heejin's face, her lips on the other girls, moving in sync. Heejin is pressed up against the door and with every movement, the door gives a little squeak.

Hyunjin doesn't even register what she's witnessing.

Heejin's eyes open slightly for a second as she takes a breath, but they go wide when she does a double take seeing Hyunjin in front of her.

"Ryujin, stop." Heejin says, wiping her mouth and pushing Ryujin back a little.

"What..." Ryujin asks, following her eye line. She freezes when she sees the girl who had just entered her backyard takes a deep breath. "Shit, Hyunjin."

Hyunjin blinks looking between them. It's clicking now.

"You... You stood me up," Hyunjin says dryly in realization, and the quiet sentiment is heart wrenching. "You left me at the diner..."

Heejin looks around, and steps forward. "Look I should've called, but-"

"But what?" Hyunjin asks more aggressively now, her voice cracking.

"Well," Heejin says, shaking her head while her eyebrows crinkle in frustration. "Well I was talking with Ryujin. I got distracted."

"Yeah I can fucking see that." Hyunjin said.

"Relax." Ryujin says, taking a defensive stand next to Heejin.

"Oh great, I'd fucking love to hear *you* say something." Hyunjin scoffs.

"Look Hyunjin I should've called, but I got sidetracked. I didn't know Ryujin would tell me how she felt when she called me over here, but she did and I needed to work it out."

Hyunjin doesn't even know what to say. What did that mean? *How she felt? How who felt?*
Ryujin?

"And one thing just led to another... But you don't need to get so mad..." Heejin says, and Hyunjin cannot believe her ears. "You and I were just going to the diner."

“As friends,” Ryujin wastes no time tacking on coolly.

Hyunjin’s eyes shift to the taller girl. Her best friend. All of her good memories with Ryujin flash in front of her eyes. Ryujin had been there with her through everything, almost as much as the other girl in front of her had. Ryujin was the person she relied on when she was too embarrassed to talk to Heejin. She was the one she told *everything* to, from what she ate in the morning to the blister progression on the bottom of her foot.

To the very vulnerable feelings she had for Heejin.

Ryujin had known all of that. And still here she was, making out with the girl she knew Hyunjin was in love with in front of her very eyes.

“Fuck you.” Hyunjin says, her eyes watering, her throat searing from the onslaught of betrayal. “Fuck both of you.”

“Hyunjin.” Heejin starts, hurt by Hyunjin’s reaction, but the girl at the gate is already spinning on her heels towards the exit.

She lets the door slam behind her as she walks to her house, the tears streaming down her face at the realization that everything she’s ever felt was all for nothing. That the two people she trusted the most didn’t have half the consideration she had for them.

I guess I just wasn’t worth it.

Hyunjin get to her room, and unleashes all her sobs into her pillow.

Hyunjin quits the soccer team after that weekend.

She stops talking the whole team, especially Ryujin, the new sole team captain. And she asks for a locker change to be as far away from Heejin as possible.

She sits in the front for geometry now. Hyunjin might’ve opted for the back, but it would be torture having to see Heejin and Ryujin sit in front of her for fifty minutes every day.

Hyunjin drives her own car around now. It’s not like she needed a carpooling buddy anymore anyway. The only place she went to outside of her house nowadays was school.

Well, besides the babysitting job.

Hyunjin still does her best to remain in good spirits when she went over. Honestly speaking, getting Hyejoo to like her was the only goal she had stuck with through everything that had happened within the past 3 months.

“My parents are here can you leave now PLEASE.” Hyejoo says in a bratty tone.

Hyunjin was ridiculously close to Hyejoo on the child’s den couch, practically smothering her into the arm rest.

“Oh yeah sorry HAHA! Good game!” She says, standing and picking up her book bag from the floor.

“You weren’t even play- you know what, okay bye.” The spoiled little eighth grader says, slamming the door shut the second Hyunjin steps out of the room.

The girl makes her way downstairs to see the rich couple she works for getting home from a post-Christmas shopping spree.

Jiwoo, the bright and bubbly half of the pairing smiles wide seeing the high schooler. “Hyunjin! Thank you so much for watching our baby, wonderful as always!” She says. “Sooyoung give me my purse!”

And the other half, the mother that Hyunjin figures little unpleasant Hyejoo takes after, hands her wife a designer purse that’s worth more than Hyunjin’s car. Jiwoo reaches in to pull out an overly embellished red envelope.

“Here’s your pay for the month, AAAAND a Christmas bonus! We’ll be in touch for scheduling for January.”

Hyunjin nods. “Thanks Mrs. Ha.” She’s about to leave when Jiwoo gasps.

“OH GOSH, I ALMOST FORGOT!” She runs out of the room leaving Hyunjin and Sooyoung alone in front of the door.

“Was that... Am I supposed to wait here?” Hyunjin asks Sooyoung. The other mother just just gives her a cold once over and walks away.

Jiwoo sprints back over to the door, a little blue card in her hand. And is that... gold around the edges?

“Here, honey! It’s an invitation to our annual New Year’s party! I know you aren’t old enough to drink, but since it is your last year with us, I thought you should be invited! I special ordered those croissants we got you as a birthday present last year.”

“CROISSANTS?” Hyunjin practically screams.

Jiwoo nods. “YES!” She shouts back. “WE WOULD LOVE TO SEE YOU THERE!”

Hyunjin nods excitedly before receiving a hug from Jiwoo. They break apart and Jiwoo escorts her out of the front door. “Drive safe sweetie!” Jiwoo says before shutting the door.

Hyunjin sits in her yellow punch buggy, and looks at the invitation.

She thinks about another annual party happening the same night. A party at her dear neighbor Ryujin’s house. One that she definitely had not gotten invited to this time around.

But she has her own plan for that event.

Besides, it’s not like it would hurt to stop for croissants beforehand anyway.

TO BE CONTINUED IN MILF SMACKDOWN CHAPTER 10

hyunjin deserves better and that better is LIA - Cat

wow that was a little fucked up of them wasnt it? SLKDJFSDKLJ

as always, let me know what you thought about the story, what your favorite part was
and if you're excited for the next chapter :p - daniela

Sooyoung & Jiwoo

Chapter Notes

my favorite couple ft. everyone's favorite cfo :) <3 enjoy! - Cat
p.s. this story takes place in the other coast of the usa (in massachusetts)

IMPORTANT: NSFW warning for mild & implied sexual content.
Trigger warnings for parental abuse (verbal, emotional). Domestic violence is mentioned, not shown. Explicit homophobia. (Not too intense on all fronts but again we just want to ensure our readers' wellbeing.)

this is a playlist w a song for each scene... start the 1st song when the story starts then every time u see a *** play the next song.. If it ends before u finish reading a scene just repeat it until you're ready to move on ok? ok. -daniela
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5XQcr2RrO1VKJhMCV2F9Rd?si=Mwbt7PCoQ2eZoDx7m72j1Q>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jungeun Kim, one of Harvard University's best, sits in her favorite rooftop bar as she downs her third drink of the night. Her legs are crossed under her short brown skirt as she drinks the shot of tequila.

Jungeun isn't sure what she was doing here, exactly, but she'd be lying if she said she didn't have some sort of expectation. The business student normally had her nights planned down to the T, even if her choice of activity for the night was "unpredictable". Jungeun was just *like that*; nothing ever happened that she wouldn't expect. And if it did, well, the night would probably be doomed to failure in her book.

So when she comes out to a skyscraper gay bar on a weekend alone, it's only natural if Jungeun got a little action. She deserved it! Things aren't really going her way in the romance department lately. Or... ever.

Jungeun is smart, getting her MBA, and an owner of a spacious apartment nearby. She *should* be living happily, but Jungeun craved something... more. If she's being honest, she's hoping that somebody would sweep her off her feet someday. But when it comes to Jungeun, she's rather... picky.

Jungeun sets her empty glass back onto the countertop as someone new enters the sky bar. Her eyes widen when she sees who it is.

The beginning words of "Jumpin' Jumpin'" by Destiny's Child ring through the bar speakers as Sooyoung Ha scopes the scene with her confident head held high. The slender woman is in low rise jeans with a slick black spaghetti strapped top cropped right above her belly button, significantly different from her normal classroom attire. Jungeun feels herself growing warm as the other girl makes eye contact with her.

She wouldn't call them friends. In fact, her acquaintanceship with Sooyoung had been just another product of one of Harvard Business School's onslaught of group projects. The pair had dominated

their group - Sooyoung calling the shots in great tandem with Jungeun who promptly executed and reinforced.

The few things Jungeun actually knows about Sooyoung Ha are that she reigns at the top of their class, is an unapologetic dictator/perfectionist/tyrant, and the elegant skips in her intonations sing of a native Korean accent.

Also, she's definitely had a fantasy or two about her classmate that may or may not have been of sexual nature.

How could you blame her? Sooyoung was well put together and all around classy, not to mention *extremely* attractive... it was all Jungeun wanted on paper.

Sooyoung smirks after catching Jungeun's attention. Similar to the other girl, Sooyoung doesn't know much about Jungeun Kim other than the fact that she's a brilliant economist, an even better mathematician, and *definitely* a bottom.

The taller girl's gaze trails up and down what she can see of her genius classmate's gorgeous body (respectfully). She begins to make her way over to the bar and Jungeun fixes what she can of herself.

"Jungeun Kim," Sooyoung says with a voice like thick, sweet honey. She takes the seat right next to her.

"Sooyoung," Jungeun blurts, shocked and much too formally.

Sooyoung smiles smugly, entertained by Jungeun's sudden awkwardness.

Jungeun furrows her eyebrows. "What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?"

Jungeun sighs and rolls her eyes, staring off behind the bar to the glowing racks of alcohol. "...Touché,"

"Can I get you something to drink," the bartender offers Sooyoung who has just sat down with a smug smile.

"I'll have a gin and tonic," Sooyoung chimes, then eyes Jungeun. "And she'll have-"

Jungeun feels her heart begin to race and cheeks flush from excitement. She feels Sooyoung analyzing her with those calculating eyes, and hopes Sooyoung can read her mind when she manifests a pina colada.

"A whiskey, neat."

Jungeun's face involuntarily scrunches up. She says nothing though, because Sooyoung Ha is *hot*. She elects to excuse the fact that the statuesque fashion model of a business student orders drinks like a lumberjack, mainly because it was still a simple drink and not something insane.

Jungeun leans on her elbows, turning toward Sooyoung as the bartender walks away. "Why would I ever want a whiskey," the brown-haired woman says with her coy smile.

"It seems like the drink for you. You look like you need some loosening up," Sooyoung says in a different, lower tone of voice, as she rests her cheek on her palm sparing glances at Jungeun's lips.

“And you think you know what I need?” Jungeun challenges.

Sooyoung smirks, and looks at her so confidently it makes Jungeun shiver. “I think I do.”

Jungeun and Sooyoung crash through the door to Sooyoung’s graduate residence apartment, making out fervidly as Sooyoung pins Jungeun against the wall. Sooyoung doesn’t bother to turn the lights on, and Jungeun can’t help but think it’s a little odd... but she shakes it off. Who knows, it might be fun... there’s a first time for everything!

Sooyoung expertly undoes her bra with her thigh angled perfectly between Jungeun’s legs, making the other business student whimper in wanting. She is delirious with short-term pleasure, that is, until Jungeun steps backward and feels something caught against her heel. As Sooyoung aggressively worships her neck, she spares a glance downward to identify the uncomfortable sensation. In the dark, she can just barely make it out.

Was that an... unfinished Twix bar stuck to her heel?

Before Jungeun is able to process any sort of disgust, Sooyoung is unbuttoning Jungeun’s pants and crashing their mouths together again.

As if the lack of light wasn’t a red enough flag for Jungeun, Sooyoung seemed to enjoy kinkier aspects of sex than Jungeun had ever pegged the domineering student for. Let’s just say that Jungeun had to press pause several times to clarify that Sooyoung was being serious.

Sooyoung is much too rough for Jungeun’s liking, which is significantly less pleasant than how Jungeun had sexually fantasized while they worked together on their group presentation: “The Microeconomics of Childhood Obesity”.

Call Jungeun sensitive , but just for once she wanted someone to love her with a little more care.

Sooyoung was quite excellent at her craft, so Jungeun had gotten what she came for easily. Plus, Sooyoung seemed to get off on domination alone, so the other woman didn’t even need to *do* anything.

But by the second round, Sooyoung had suddenly felt comfortable enough to call Jungeun “her little slut”, and right then and there is where she decided to shove the taller girl off.

Sooyoung is initially confused at the sudden change in atmosphere, but immediately respects her acquaintance with an awkward apology. Jungeun wraps herself up in one of her classmate’s blankets in the most regretful stupor she’s ever experienced.

But the biggest red flag of them all hits Jungeun directly in the face when Sooyoung stands to go flick on the light switch.

Sooyoung’s apartment is littered with open business school textbooks, greasy pizza boxes, papers *everywhere*, clothes, and the list of miscellaneous garbage goes on. There is a pitiful pathway Sooyoung has made for herself through her strewn belongings - a paved road through the wilderness, if you will.

Jungeun gapes at the disgusting graduate residence in horror. All her thoughts of *ever* having anything further with Sooyoung are immediately thrown out the window.

Naked with her long black hair tousled, Sooyoung makes her way to the small kitchen in sight and opens a stray pizza box sitting at the side of the sink.

Jungeun feels like she has slipped into an alternate reality at the sight of perfect Sooyoung (and her bare ass cheeks) munching on pizza over the sink like a rat.

Jungeun doesn't even know what to say. She has, quite literally, never been more turned off in her entire life.

Sooyoung turns to look at her acquaintance with a mouthful of pizza, not sure as to why she's staring at her. "*Wha-umph?*"

"Sooyoung... don't you think this is a little... Nasty?" Jungeun asks, appalled and wrapping her naked body tighter with Sooyoung's blankets in fear of a rat climbing out of the mountainous pile of papers by her desk.

Sooyoung simply waves her off, apparently not caring, as she horks down the pizza slice hungrily only to grab another. The gorgeous woman chews so loudly that Jungeun can hear it all the way from the bed, unlike any time Jungeun has ever seen Sooyoung eat so daintily in public.

Jungeun continues to watch her in horror like a monster had replaced the respectable, sexy Sooyoung she thought she knew.

"Whamph somph?" Sooyoung calls out between bites. She turns a bit to Jungeun from the kitchen, offering the pizza box. "I hafph wings tfoo," she munches, pointing to a smaller box. Sooyoung loves some greasy food after working hard. (She likes to save the chicken wings for last!)

Jungeun is silent as her face is so frozen in disgust.

"No thank you, I..." Jungeun shivers as she sees a bit of leftover junk food on the floor. "I think I'm gonna head home..."

Sooyoung's shoulders slump a little.

"Ifs dark, you can ssleep hewere," Sooyoung offers politely as she continues to om-nom on the pizza. "We dfont haf to shfare the bev."d."

"No..." Jungeun says again, looking around apprehensively and trying not to sound so horrified. "I... have to... no..."

"Okay," Sooyoung calls. She can't say she's surprised. She doesn't mind at all that women don't stay; she's not looking for anything more than decent sex to kill time. But Jungeun is the fourth girl this month to leave right after she'd turned on the lights... it was kind of hurting her ego.

While Jungeun gets dressed in a rush, afraid to trip on her pant leg and fall into the mess, Sooyoung takes a long look at the dump-clutter she's made this month. Maybe she *should* tidy up.

"Be safe!" Sooyoung says nonchalantly, opening up the amazing box of wings slowly as an excited grin grows on her face.

Jungeun as swiftly as she can, because what on God's green earth was *that*.

"EEEEEE! Jungie I'm so EXCITED!" the high pitched voice squeals, making Jungeun wince

dramatically from the volume right by her ear.

Jungeun, in yet another one of her hopeful attempts to meet her true love, has decided to accept an invitation to a *party*. Of course, Jungeun was never one for going alone.

So Jungeun decided to invite her best friend for life and polar opposite who doesn't even go here - bubbly, happy-go-lucky Jiwoo.

Jiwoo squeals again, and Jungeun furrows her eyebrows but feels her heart excite a bit from the contact high. "A Harvard party!" Jiwoo says, twirling through the night in front of them in her pink dress.

Jiwoo does not, in fact, attend Harvard Business School. But these two girls had grown up together here in Massachusetts, attending school together since they were four years old. When Jiwoo had bullies in the sandbox, Jungeun *always* scared them off, despite them not even being friends yet.

That is, until their freshman year of high school when Jungeun got detention after telling off a girl who had been picking on Jiwoo for weeks. The bubblier girl had left freshly baked muffins in Jungeun's locker and the rest was sort of history.

The business student always had Jiwoo's back, and when Jungeun (ever the overachiever) was drowning in her own stress, Jiwoo always had some ludicrous endeavors of her own to share that would make her laugh.

For a majority of their lives, the two girls moved together as one, just like the sun and moon themselves. Even when Jungeun had traveled to Stanford University for undergrad, Jiwoo had constantly mailed her beloved bestie supportive letters and baked goods. While Jungeun double majored in economics and math, Jiwoo had stayed local, attending Boston State and recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree in education.

You can imagine how loud Jiwoo had screamed into the phone when Jungeun announced she would be coming back to Boston for business school.

"Isn't this so exciting, Jungie!" Jiwoo cheers through the cold air of Harvard yard, as they approach the door to the booming venue. Their breaths are visible in the chilly night, but they walk donning the sluttiest outfits that smart-and-preppy allows.

"It's... Well-" Jungeun doesn't exactly know how exciting, considering she's never been to party in a while. Or ever.

Yeah, she was getting pretty desperate.

As they step down a staircase to the venue's door, Jungeun eyes Jiwoo who looks *way* too excited for her own good. Jungeun technically isn't allowed to bring any outsiders in.

"Just... Please blend in, okay?"

"Yes, I go here," Jiwoo declares in a stern, know-it-all voice as a caricature of Jungeun and her peers. "I am studying the economy. Consumerism! China."

Jungeun and Jiwoo are about thirty minutes into the social gathering, and all Jiwoo's attempts at matchmaking her best friend have failed miserably.

“Jungie, did you just invite me here so you could feel better about having no one to talk to?”

“That’s absurd!” Jungeun immediately rejects despite it being the literal truth - she needed Jiwoo here to soften her very probable falls. Jungeun seemed to never get it right with women these days; if she couldn’t picture herself marrying the girl right at that moment, she would toss them aside. Her expectations were insurmountable.

She pouts, staring into the crowd of business students.

“What about her!” Jiwoo suggests, gesturing to a sophisticated Harvard girl who is standing by the DJ at the end of the clubhouse. Jiwoo can overhear her talking with a British accent.

Jungeun crinkles her face. “Definitely not. I don’t like blondes.”

Jiwoo tuts, irritated. “Always something with you Jungie! Too tall, too loud, too-”

Jungeun is still pouting at the wall, so it takes her a few seconds to notice that Jiwoo has completely stopped mid sentence. The business student turns back to her best friend.

Jiwoo staring off at... something in the distance... with the most *impassioned* desire. Jiwoo’s cheeks are flushed even in the purple party light, and her pupils are dilated the most Jungeun’s ever seen.

“Who’s that,” Jiwoo whispers, bewitched.

Jungeun turns to follow her best friend’s eye line, and chokes on her drink.

Jungeun feels like she’s in a fever dream. Standing across the room is the one and only Sooyoung Ha, sipping her drink alone and making the most *intense* primal eye contact with Jiwoo she’s ever seen.

Jungeun’s eyes panickedly dart between her best friend and her most recent hookup, and Sooyoung looks like a lion ready to gobble precious little Jiwoo up.

“ABSOLUTELY FUCKING NOT!” Jungeun yells, like they are two very different species who have no business breeding. But Jiwoo doesn’t care, still staring at the gorgeous girl shamelessly.

She is the most beautiful girl that Jiwoo has ever seen in her life. And Jiwoo has seen Beyonce up close and in person at a meet and greet. She is *convinced* this girl is prettier. *Okay, let’s not get too crazy*, Jiwoo corrects quickly with an apology to the pop star in her head. But this girl has the bone structure like she was sculpted by the Gods, and the perfect body to match. *Wait, maybe that’s... God...*

“Talk to her for me, Jungie,” Jiwoo insists, practically feeling a separate heartbeat in her vagina. “I think I’m in love...”

“You are making a mistake,” her friend warns.

“I love to make mistakes...” Jiwoo breathes. “I made eight on the way here...” Her legs almost walk over to Sooyoung involuntarily from their sheer magnetism alone.

“Jiwoo- No! Stop that! Not her!”

“But why?” Jiwoo whines.

“She’s my friend! Sort of! Not really! We hooked up and it was awful! Like, *very* awful! You would hate her!”

But Jiwoo doesn’t seem to care at all, drinking Sooyoung in like the tall glass of water she is. The Asian business student’s self-assured disposition and those God-damned *eyes* make Jiwoo’s skin feel like it’s on fire. “I want her. I want to serve her. Literally, I want to make her French Toast.”

“What are you trying to be, her *maid*?”

“Get her for me now Jungie.” Jiwoo now has her chin angled downward, making her look ridiculous.

“What are you doing?” her best friend questions.

“I’m trying to appear submissive,” Jiwoo whispers, lowering her chin even more to nearly form a double chin. “And shorter.”

Jungeun looks over to Sooyoung, who is absolutely eating it up with her eyes. Jungeun drags her palm over her face.

Jiwoo raises a hand to wave at the faraway business student, wiggling her fingers flirtatiously while Jungeun swats her hand down. “Jiwoo!”

Jiwoo pouts, but still not breaking eye contact with Sooyoung. “If you love me Jungie you will get her for me now.”

Jungeun sighs deeply. What was supposed to be a night of Jiwoo playing wingwoman has turned out to be the absolute opposite.

As Jungeun struts over to Sooyoung, the taller Asian woman doesn’t even seem to notice Jungeun is there. “You, enough of that,” Jungeun hisses at her immediately.

“Your friend over there looks so submissive... And short.” Sooyoung says, continuing to match Jiwoo well in their sex eyes competition. “My type of woman...”

“Stop! She’s like my little sister!” Jungeun says, then looks over to see Jiwoo slightly turning to put her ass on full display. “You two are acting like freaks!”

Sooyoung continues to look Jiwoo up and down with fire in her eyes. “Have you been hiding her? I’ve never seen her around...”

“That’s because she doesn’t go here.”

“Where does she go then? MIT?” Sooyoung asks, referring to the other prestigious institution down the street.

“Boston State,” Jungeun answers, charged with defensiveness for Jiwoo, but Sooyoung doesn’t seem to mind at all as she hums into her cup looking happier than Jungeun’s ever seen her, smiling giddily. Jiwoo is continuing to entertain their prolonged telepathic lesbian sex with much enthusiasm. “You are *not* going after my best friend.”

“She’s a big girl Jungeun,” Sooyoung hums. “Let her decide what she wants.”

And from the way Jiwoo’s eyebrows are wiggling suggestively, it’s fairly clear what she wants.

Sooyoung hands her unfinished drink off to Jungeun, and walks over to Jiwoo confidently. Jungeun chugs the remainder of her classmate's drink, which does no favors for the fact that she now wants to vomit.

Jiwoo's entire body goes into overdrive as she sees the most beautiful woman she's *ever* seen walk over to her agonizingly slowly with a teasing little smile.

Sooyoung stops in front of the shorter woman.

"Tu es une belle vache." Jiwoo breathes, starstruck.

You are a beautiful cow.

Sooyoung's eyes widen in amusement at the smaller girl. *"Tu parles français?"* The Harvard student returns, in flawless French.

"Oui, je possède un buffle d'eau, merci de l'avoir demandé."

Yes, I own a water buffalo, thank you for asking.

Sooyoung laughs incredulously, and Jiwoo's heart thumps along a rhythm she's never felt before at the melody. Jiwoo nearly drops to her knees right then and there.

Jiwoo grants a playful, triumphant smirk, proud of her French that is apparently working. (She has no idea what the fuck she said.)

Sooyoung looks at her with a glowing, residual smile.

Before the two lesbians can say more to each other, they are interrupted by Jungeun who has walked over only because she has no one else to talk to. "Hello-"

"I'd love a drink, Jungeun, thank you," Sooyoung says.

"I didn't offer to get you a drink!" Jungeun grumbles.

"I want vodka," Jiwoo says, ignoring her and still taking in Sooyoung's flawless face (especially her lips that she wants on hers *oh* so dearly).

"That's so sexy, actually," Sooyoung says nonsensically to Jiwoo, which lights the shorter girl's eyes all the way up.

Jungeun groans, any attempt at conversation with them being futile, and leaves to get them drinks.

Sooyoung smiles at the *very* gorgeous girl in front of her. She takes in her hopeful bright eyes, her adorable chocolate brown bangs shimmering under purple party light. "What's your name?"

"Yes," Jiwoo answers immediately.

"Beautiful," Sooyoung says, ever suave. "My name is Sooyoung."

Jiwoo suddenly lets out an involuntary moan. Sooyoung stifles a chuckle from the other girl's eagerness.

Jungeun returns then, handing each of them two Solo cups of strawberry lemonade and vodka like a waitress. “Thank you,” they say, not even breaking eye contact with each other as they take generous swigs.

Jungeun takes one look between them, and knows she has no place here anymore. “Be safe Jiwoo,” Jungeun groans, and bounds for the exit to miserably eat another pint of ice cream in her empty bathtub.

“I have to tell you a secret,” Jiwoo whispers seductively.

Sooyoung perks an eyebrow. “Oh, please do,” she indulges with a smile.

Jiwoo excitedly leans in by Sooyoung’s ears on her tippy toes.

“I’m not supposed to be here,” Jiwoo whispers. “I stick out like a dog’s balls.”

Sooyoung chokes on her drink laughing.

“A turd in a punchbowl,” Jiwoo continues, running with it. “A porcupine in a nudist colony. A pregnant pole vaulter. I’m very good with similes.”

Sooyoung is enamored. “I can tell,” she smiles enthusiastically.

“Anyways, I am not supposed to be here.” Jiwoo bats her eyelashes.

“I think you’re exactly where you need to be,” Sooyoung smirks at Jiwoo, more than entertained on who she’s stumbled upon tonight.

“Who are you?”

“I can be anything you want me to be.” Jiwoo says, still fueling their continued stare off.

“Oh really?” Sooyoung giggles smoothly. “Well I think I want you to be mine tonight.”

Suddenly, the music switches, and the volume amps up as the bass notes of a piano bang through the speakers. The crowd of Harvard students whoop loudly, immediately recognizing the song to be the new hit of the year “...Baby One More Time” by Britney Spears.

Sooyoung snakes an arm around Jiwoo’s back, pulling her flush against her chest.

“Would you like to dance with me?” Sooyoung asks dazingly.

“Would I,” Jiwoo says with stares in her eyes, as mysterious Sooyoung’s grip around her becomes arousingly possessive. Sooyoung smiles down at her with flames dancing in her dark eyes.

Jiwoo wraps an arm comfortably around Sooyoung’s neck. The business student’s hands tug at Jiwoo’s waist and their bodies move against each other making Jiwoo’s breath hitch violently.

The pre-chorus begins to build as the two sway in complete sync, Sooyoung leading as the friction of their bodies is beginning to become unbearable. The music booms through the clubhouse as Jiwoo is barely breathing, her lips parted as Sooyoung looks absolutely transfixed by her.

“What’s your name, really,” Sooyoung asks, entranced by Jiwoo’s sweet feminine perfume, the deep blush on her cheeks.

“Jiwoo,” she breathes with her eyes trained on Sooyoung’s lips. Sooyoung notices, and smirks,

purposely trailing her hands up the small of Jiwoo's back to the exposed skin her rosy pink dress allows.

"Jiwoo," Sooyoung says for the first time oh so slowly, absolutely in love with the way it rolls of her mouth. Jiwoo's eyes are wide, wanting nothing more than her.

Sooyoung's hand rises to tilt Jiwoo's chin upwards, a thumb dragging a bit over her lower lip.

"It's quite the pleasure to meet you Jiwoo," Sooyoung whispers with her ice cold breath right by Jiwoo's ear.

My loneliness... is killing me!

(And I!)

Jiwoo is now completely drowning in Sooyoung, in her scent, her skin, her essence. The lights have begun flashing above them violently as they dance up on each other.

To Jiwoo, Sooyoung feels better than safety - she feels like *fire*.

I must confess, I still believe!

(Still believe!)

As the beat takes them, Jiwoo sways and turns around with her backside, grinding against Sooyoung who secures her even closer.

Sooyoung's lips finally grace Jiwoo's skin with slow kisses on her neckline, making the shorter girl recline her head back in ecstasy.

When I'm not with you I lose my mind...

Give me a sign!

Jiwoo turns around in Sooyoung's arms, at long last crashing their lips together.

Hit me baby one more time!

Sooyoung and Jiwoo are at it for hours. The business student could have never foreseen just how much the other girl had in her.

After so many subpar one night stands, Sooyoung gave up on the possibility of a woman having *everything* she wanted. Jiwoo had quickly proved her wrong. For a woman who presented as so innocent in style and demeanor, Sooyoung had found out that Jiwoo was anything but.

The other university student was so eager to please, so intoxicating that Sooyoung knew instantly that this was the best sex she's ever had. Every single round had left Sooyoung hungry for more of her, missing Jiwoo even when her mouth was off of her for even a second - and Jiwoo worshipped her with the same fervor.

As Jiwoo finally stops to catch her breath after the umpteenth round, Sooyoung peppers gracious kisses up her soft body. Jiwoo's fingers massage Sooyoung's scalp through her messy black hair,

and Sooyoung connects their lips together once more for a sweaty, passionate kiss.

Sooyoung breaks away, smiling playfully down at her in surprise. “That was fun,” she whispers between them, gently brushing stray hairs away from Jiwoo’s half-open eyes.

The two women look upon each other with unspoken wonder. Jiwoo sighs in speechless, dreamy affirmation, and can’t even find the words as she cherishes every detail about Sooyoung looking down at her.

Jiwoo, sweaty and breathless, looks absolutely divine to Sooyoung. The business student almost feels self-conscious, when she never has before with girls in her bed.

She peels herself off Jiwoo carefully, afraid of the foreign emotion and attempting to shove it down. Sooyoung is not one for cuddling after hook-ups, and of course, is ravenous for her routine post-coitus meal of pizza and chicken wings.

The Harvard student flicks on the light switch. She’s tidied up just a tad since Jungeun had shamed her, but not much. Her heart sinks a little at the thought of sweet Jiwoo being disgusted behind her. But the lights have already been turned on... this is probably where their night ends, Sooyoung thinks to herself with a tinge of sadness. *Was she.. sad?* She immediately disregards the thought.

“I’m gonna grab a little bite to eat, I’m famished,” Sooyoung calls out as she walks over to her new boxes of pizza and wings by the sink. “It’s not too late, but I can walk you home if you’d like-”

“Are those WINGS?” Jiwoo exclaims loudly, suddenly having regained every ounce of energy.

Sooyoung turns around slowly. “...Yes,” she raises her eyebrows, intrigued.

“I love wings!” Jiwoo swoons.

Sooyoung’s eyes widen in shock, staring at her from the kitchen.

“...Really?”

“Yes!” Jiwoo cheers as she covers her chest with Sooyoung’s white sheets. She wears a bright smile, not at all disgusted by the mess Sooyoung’s made in her small graduate housing unit. “Can I have some?” she asks shyly.

Sooyoung’s never met a girl who wanted to stay for the wings...

Her heart starts to thump faster in her chest.

“Wait- Really?”

“Yes silly, I’m always hungry for gross food after!” Jiwoo smiles sweetly, scooting over a bit and patting the spot next to her. “Let’s eat them here!”

And she wanted to eat them in bed? Sooyoung feels like she’s dreaming.

Uncharacteristically giddily, the Sooyoung the Harvard ice queen waddles back over with her box of chicken wings. She sits with Jiwoo opening the box up for her, dipping her pretty little hand into the saucy pile of chicken.

The two of them rest the box between them, eating their messy post-sex snack together more than comfortably. Their bare legs brush up against each other, and Sooyoung blushes for the act feels more intimate than any bout of sex.

Sooyoung looks over at Jiwoo, who had already been staring at her with a fluttering heart.

Jiwoo, whose face is already a bit covered in buffalo sauce, crinkles her whole face in a shy, saucy smile.

Sooyoung thinks that it might just be the prettiest thing she's ever seen.

The managerial economics professor drones on at the front of Harvard's ancient lecture hall, presenting a slideshow that is much too boring for most. Usually, Sooyoung would be taking diligent notes, or paying attention intently to make her own sense of the information.

But today, she was staring off into space, her mind occupied with thoughts of the beautiful girl she had in her bed last night.

Although she was back to her normal, dreary life, all that Sooyoung can think of is the way Jiwoo had looked so beautifully under the flashing purple-pink light of the clubhouse. Sooyoung feels overcome with the tangible memory of Jiwoo's body dancing on hers; she can still smell her intoxicating perfume. And she can't stop thinking about the way Jiwoo felt pushing against her, the high-pitched noises she would make-

But it was leagues more than simply sexual (and it would be so much easier if it were just that). Sooyoung just could *not* stop thinking about everything about Jiwoo if she tried. From her sweet smile as they sat together eating chicken wings messily, to the way Sooyoung looked up and caught Jiwoo already staring at her. Those bright stars in her eyes when Sooyoung asked for her number to invite her over again sometime.

Sooyoung wanted to call Jiwoo since the moment she woke up. The feeling was absurd - who calls their hook-up the morning after?! But for the sake of not only keeping her cool, but fear of ruining it, she has forced herself not to.

Suddenly, everyone is lifting from their seats. The class must have ended, and Sooyoung stares down at her notebook with nothing but today's date written down. She swiftly packs her belongings in her simple bag to walk out of class, obeying the compulsion to exit the door before everyone else.

When Sooyoung steps out of class, she is sure she's hallucinating.

"Sooyoung!" Jiwoo chirps excitedly, randomly standing right outside the Harvard lecture hall in a floral dress and pretty sunhat. She looks like the happiest angel in the world as Sooyoung exits the class and stops dead in her tracks.

The remaining students begin to filter out behind them, eyeing Sooyoung nosily with surprise. Does the great dictator Sooyoung Ha have... a girlfriend?

Sooyoung is blushing furiously. "Jiwoo? What are you doing here- How did you know which building I was in?!"

"I called the Dean and fake cried saying it was a family emergency, but that's not important!" Jiwoo cheers crazily, while Sooyoung gives her very confused and alarmed eyes. It was a little insane for her to do that, but somehow because it was Jiwoo, it seemed... ridiculously endearing. "I made you this!"

While the other students filter out around them to get to their next destination, Jiwoo hands

Sooyoung a pink, dainty little box with a transparent window on its ceiling. Inside is a little yellow cupcake, perfectly iced.

“You... brought me a cupcake?”

Jiwoo grabs Sooyoung’s hand to place the box in, and Sooyoung is as red as a tomato. People are *really* looking now.

“Well, last night was fun and I wanted to do something nice for you,” Jiwoo explains with faux confidence; she is playing with her fingers behind her back. She hasn’t been able to stop thinking about the other girl either.

“Oh- Wow, thank you,” the sophisticated CEO-to-be doesn’t really know how to handle this situation, as she’s never had a hook-up track her down and present her with gifts the next morning. “But I actually don’t eat cupcakes,” she says delicately. “I’m not one for sweets.”

“Please just try?” Jiwoo pleads. “It’s my family’s recipe,” she adds sweetly.

Sooyoung takes one look at Jiwoo’s desperate eyes, and knows it would be a crime to say no.

Hesitantly, she opens up the box that Jiwoo supports with her hands as well. Their hands brush up against each other - Sooyoung’s, timidly; Jiwoo’s, comfortably.

Sooyoung carefully lifts up the perfect, aromatic cupcake and takes a bite.

Jiwoo smirks as she watches her little crush moan into the cake. “Oh my goodness,” Sooyoung says with wide eyes, darting between the pastry and Jiwoo. The lemon cupcake is so decadently light, moist, and fluffy despite being made hours ago. “That is simply divine,” Sooyoung says with a mouth full of cake.

“Sooyoung,” Jiwoo starts nervously, looking away. “I had a... A really nice time with you,” she says, and Sooyoung melts at the sight. “Would you want to go out with me again sometime?” Jiwoo really hopes this works. She brought one of her best cupcakes for a reason.

Sooyoung feels her insides become all warm and fuzzy. Before the ice queen can question it-

“Sure,” she says simply. “Yes I would.”

Jiwoo smiles excitedly, then squeals loudly making Sooyoung wince but laugh all the same. “Come on then!” she cheers, then suddenly holds Sooyoung’s hand, making Sooyoung choke on the cupcake.

“What- Now?!”

“Why not!” Jiwoo exclaims happily, ignoring the fact that Sooyoung is a full-time business student.

The shorter girl intertwines their fingers, pulls high and mighty Sooyoung off to the building’s exit, towards the pristine, grassy lawns of Harvard yard. Sooyoung can’t bring herself to stop Jiwoo.

Then again, she doesn’t think she wants to.

Sooyoung is not exactly sure where Jiwoo got the idea that they were more than just a one-night stand, but she isn’t complaining.

Together they sit on the green grass of Harvard University's quad, and have been talking for hours.

Well, *Jiwoo* was the one talking for hours, but Sooyoung sat listening intently to her, who seemed like a character out of an animated movie. Usually, if a hook-up had insisted on extra time with Sooyoung, she would tune them out while thinking about the other items on her agenda, or devote attention to their physical features as opposed to their words. But Jiwoo was just... so *eccentric*, so unlike anything Sooyoung has ever seen before (in the best way) that she couldn't help but listen.

Sooyoung has so far learned that jovial Jiwoo is a proud owner of six black belts from six different institutions, has baked since she learned hand-eye coordination, and is studying for the licensure exam to become an elementary school teacher for the state of Massachusetts.

Right now, Jiwoo is telling Sooyoung about how cool it would be to become the sole person the United States entrusts with all the nuclear missile codes, only for her to "forget" them and therefore be the solution to unequivocal world peace.

"I have a question," Sooyoung interrupts.

"Yes!" Jiwoo asks with a bright smile, not even winded from talking for so long.

"Who..." Sooyoung squints with an intrigued smile. "Who are you...?"

"Jiwoo!" Jiwoo says, then gasps. "Do you have Alzheimer's?"

"No, no," Sooyoung giggles softly. "I mean... Where did you *come from*?"

"Well I live near Boston State, so I took public transport then I walked."

"No- Okay, here is my real question," Sooyoung chuckles. "Are you sure you're Jungeun's best friend?"

Jiwoo cheers proudly. "Jungie! I love her so much!"

Sooyoung is still confused. "Jungeun Kim? Boring old grumpy Jungeun?"

"HEY." Jiwoo scowls at Sooyoung defensively. "I *love* Jungeun. She's my bestie forever and ever and ever."

Sooyoung looks down at the grass hiding a bewildered smirk. "It just doesn't make sense." She looks back at Jiwoo, smiling with her heart filling to the brim for every second her eyes spend on her.

"She said you two had sex!" Jiwoo says, and Sooyoung's stomach drops at Jiwoo's forwardness. Jiwoo nods off into the distance wistfully. "I feel so close to her. I've always wanted to feel as one with her," Jiwoo says weirdly, and takes a second to notice the look Sooyoung is giving her. "Not like that! I didn't mean like *that*," Jiwoo giggles.

"How else did you mean it??"

"... Jungie is the best, most important friend I've ever had," Jiwoo smiles, recounting memories of Jungeun sitting with her at school when no one else would, entertaining her wacky pursuits, or being her companion to bring-a-friend karate. Sooyoung sees the way Jiwoo touches upon something so deep in her soul, and smiles.

“We’re like two sides of completely different coins that got superglued together. And now they can’t be torn apart.” Jiwoo says reverently, but Sooyoung squints.

“What does that even mean?”

“We’re not even compatible people, but by some strange and overwhelming force we are inseparable.” Jiwoo smiles. “We aren’t even the same currency. She is a nickel and I am a peso.”

“You are a dime,” Sooyoung flirts shamelessly and horribly, but Jiwoo seems to eat it up as she squeals so hard you might think she was being tickled. Sooyoung watches with perplexed eyes. She doesn’t regret that though... It was kinda cute.

Sooyoung smiles a bit at Jiwoo as the sun goes down, the gentle breeze rustling through their dark hair and Jiwoo’s sunhat. “That’s lovely,” Sooyoung says honestly. Jiwoo pulls her dress over her legs for more warmth, and Sooyoung nearly leaps from her place to wrap her arm around her.

What is *happening* to her?

Sooyoung shakes her head a bit to snap out of her thoughts. She returned to focus again on Jiwoo’s words.

“Why would two coins of different currency be superglued together...?” Sooyoung asks. “Who would do that?”

“Me. I am the peso, and the glue, and the gluer.” Jiwoo smiles proudly.

It’s definitely not how Sooyoung would ever explain a friendship.

She’s enchanted by that.

Jiwoo looks down, fearing a bit of judgement for another one of her odd analogies. “Does that make sense? I don’t know maybe that was stupid,” Jiwoo says, a tad bit of insecurity shining through an effervescent front. “But it makes sense to me and... that’s what matters.”

Jiwoo looks over, and Sooyoung is smiling at her kindly in the grass as the sunset is beginning to reflect off her pale skin. “It makes sense to me too,” she nods honestly, and Jiwoo sighs happily with the feeling of being truly seen.

The more Jiwoo speaks that afternoon, the more Sooyoung learns probably the most important thing about Jiwoo - that she is unapologetically, irrevocably unconventional.

The brown-haired girl speaks without a norm in the world to conform to, other than kindness. Sooyoung thinks that this may be what she admires the most.

As someone who has had every ounce of unorthodox forcibly stomped out of her, Sooyoung reaps the fruit from Jiwoo’s every sentence like a breath of fresh air. There is a beautiful naivete that is somehow coupled with an aged wisdom that Sooyoung thinks she may have to spend years studying to fully understand. Sooyoung doesn’t want to get ahead of herself, but at this moment she thinks that she would do so willingly.

“What do you like to do?” Jiwoo asks. “I spent so long talking about me but I want to know about you too,” she requests shyly. “What are your hobbies?”

“Ummm...” Sooyoung has to think hard on that one. She racks her brain... and comes up empty.

“Um... I like to read...”

“Ooh! Like what? Fiction? Romance?” Jiwoo chirps. “I read *Catcher in the Rye* once. Turns out there was no bread. How lame is that.”

Sooyoung chuckles. “Um... I like *Market Leader... Think & Grow Rich... Information Systems... Oh, and Value Proposition Design-*”

“...Sooyoung are those your textbooks?” Jiwoo asks incredulously.

“Yes,” Sooyoung says shamefully. She feels awfully dull in comparison to the bright sunshine at her side.

Jiwoo giggles. “Okay, I admire your dedication to school... But where’s the fun in that?”

“It is fun!” Sooyoung counters defensively. “*Think & Grow Rich* is an excellently composed manual to-”

“I mean *creative* fun.” Jiwoo smiles.

Sooyoung looks around the golden grass. She never had any allowance for that.

“I used to dance,” she says quietly.

“*Dancing!* How fun!” Jiwoo’s face lights up at the sight of beautiful Sooyoung dancing. “Wait, used to? Why not anymore?”

Sooyoung stiffens. “I don’t feel comfortable talking about that.” Jiwoo is silent for a few beats, and Sooyoung can feel the other girl looking at her.

“Okay,” Jiwoo says softly. Sooyoung is surprised to see Jiwoo staring at her with a gentle smile.

Sooyoung is shocked. She was expecting a fight, or at least some pushback. “...Really?”

“Yeah! We just met yesterday.”

The words are true, but between the two of them, they feel like they’ve known each other a lifetime. The eye contact between them is almost healing. “Thank you,” Sooyoung murmurs appreciatively, before breaking away into a bit of a silence as she focuses her gaze on the blades of grass. But the silence is comfortable, just like last night when they brushed up against one another munching on saucy buffalo wings after sex.

Before she knows it, Jiwoo has leaned over to kiss Sooyoung on the cheek sweetly.

Sooyoung’s eyes shoot wide open at the gentleness, and looks to Jiwoo who looks undeniably nervous for some reason (as if they haven’t already had the most extensive sexual relations). Jiwoo looks away shyly from her place in the grass, looking even more radiant in the light of the Cambridge sunset.

Sooyoung leans over hastily to do the same to Jiwoo, but misses a tad and ends up pecking at her temple instead. Jiwoo giggles, and looks at her endearingly.

Jiwoo then scootches over on the grass and leans on Sooyoung’s shoulder, reaching to hold her hand and intertwine their fingers.

Sooyoung likes Jiwoo.

Their first real and official date is a few days later at a drive-in. Sooyoung has been a student here in America for over five years now, but has never been to a drive-in movie theater. Jiwoo was appalled, and took immediate action to rectify the situation.

Together they sit, munching on popcorn happily and bundled under a blanket in the back of Jiwoo's red 1999 Chevy Tracker. The relatively new horror movie *The Sixth Sense* is playing on the bright screen as Boston locals and other students have camped out around them.

"*I wanna tell you my secret now,*" the main character, a little Caucasian boy, whispers on the screen to Bruce Willis from the hospital bed.

"*Okay,*" Bruce Willis whispers back. The boy breathes apprehensively for a few beats, as Sooyoung and Jiwoo can hear nothing but the crickets in the Massachusetts night and the other couples rustling through their snacks around them.

"*I see dead people,*" the boy whispers.

Jiwoo bursts into a loud giggling fit, her hand immediately going to her mouth to contain herself but she cannot, for the life of her, stop laughing. Sooyoung looks at her incredulously, shushing her playfully as she knows Jiwoo's laughter reaches a wide radius as is. "Shhh!" Sooyoung hisses, while unable to contain her *own* laughter.

The couple are now laughing like kids in the middle of the horror movie.

An older woman in the car in front of them turns around. "Quiet down! Too loud!"

Jiwoo is immediately flushed and embarrassed in the white light of the cinema beam. Sooyoung defensively snatches a bunch of Junior Mints from the box and pelts them at the older woman, missing terribly but hitting her car. Jiwoo gasps, and bursts into uncontrollable laughter again.

The two are a laughing mess in the car as Sooyoung has moved to chuck their popcorn protectively, until the woman notices all the junk food in her car seats and is outraged.

Sooyoung doesn't mind though - Jiwoo loves to kiss in the backseat, do frighteningly accurate impressions of Bruce Willis, and teach Sooyoung the proper way to eat french fries (the answer: after dipping them in the chocolate milkshake).

In these moments, Sooyoung feels her heart falling into Jiwoo's gentle hands. Jiwoo plays its golden strings masterfully, like she was born to. Sooyoung learns then and there that she'll never forget her - and *never* wants to.

As it's nighttime in Massachusetts, it is morning in South Korea. Sooyoung's cell, tucked into her bag still in the front seat, buzzes violently with neglected calls and texts from home.

When Sooyoung gets home that night, she finally picks up her phone.

"Mother?"

"*Why have you not answered any of my calls,*" Sooyoung mother says harshly into the cell phone line from overseas.

It's the next morning now - Sooyoung hadn't touched her phone all last night as every moment coming out of Jiwoo's car was spent making their way to the bedroom. Sooyoung was on her way to her microeconomics lecture now.

Sooyoung's stomach drops at her mother's tone. "I'm sorry," she immediately says, conversing with her mother in their native tongue.

"Are you becoming distracted?" she asks pointedly. "Do you think we break our backs paying your tuition for you to be fooling around?"

Sooyoung's eyes flicker in angered annoyance. She knows she's gotten into Harvard Business School, (hell, Harvard for undergrad) on a hefty scholarship, not only because of her family's poverty but primarily as a result of her own academic merit.

"What are you going to do, come over here?" Sooyoung has the sudden bravery to taunt.

The other end of the line is quiet, and Sooyoung instantly regrets the impulsive defiance with her entire being.

Fear overwhelms her like a tidal wave washing over her violently.

"I'm sorry Mother-"

"I should slap you right now." her mother spits into the phone. "I can be over there tomorrow and beat you in front of all of your classmates. Is that what you want?"

Sooyoung's signature confidence is suddenly reduced to nothing. "No! No- I'm sor-"

"You're not sorry at all, Sooyoung." Her mother says, the name laced with unquantifiable disgust.

"I-I am, I am-" Sooyoung pleads, having painful flashbacks to when they would enter the same dialogue when she was a little girl.

"You owe everything to the both of us. for this sorry life we gave you," she snaps, while Sooyoung "You ingrate."

Sooyoung is frozen as the air is lodged in her throat. The last time her mother called her ungrateful with such vehement conviction was in primary school, before she locked her crying daughter in their dirty bathroom for an entire night.

Sooyoung stares at the aged cobblestones of Harvard's ground with a panicked expression.

"I'm sorry Mother, I didn't mean to sound ungrateful."

"I could have you unenrolled, you know."

"No, Mother- Please,"

"Talk back or leave me waiting one more time and I will, Sooyoung. Do you understand me?" she barks into the phone at her daughter, who squeezes her eyes shut as she leans against the pillar, suddenly feeling like she is about to pass out.

"Yes," Sooyoung whispers painfully, barely finishing before the line cuts harshly.

“They’re here,” Jiwoo breathes with fright in her eyes.

Sooyoung turns to face her girlfriend, who looks more terrified than she’s ever seen her. Jiwoo gasps as she sees something behind Sooyoung. Before Sooyoung can turn around, Jiwoo roughly grabs her wrist. “Oh my God Sooyoung, run!”

Jiwoo bolts straight ahead through the moldy parking garage as she fastens her grip on Sooyoung’s hand. The eerily dim yellow lights flick on above their heads to illuminate the ground, as they run down the concrete ramp.

Sooyoung is sprinting to keep up with the other young woman for dear life. All she can hear is their heavy feet pounding against the pavement, and her own breaths growing heavier and heavier.

“Don’t look back!” she hears Jiwoo cry out desperately. “*You’ll slow us down!*”

Sooyoung is getting winded. Dread begins to swallow her whole as she feels herself slowing little by little, to the point where Jiwoo is nearly dragging her along to save them.

Sooyoung’s lungs are on fire within her chest.

She cannot run anymore.

Sooyoung, against Jiwoo’s command, turns her head expecting some allowance for slowing.

Only a few feet behind them is their chaser.

Sooyoung’s father as all-white, unblinking eyes that terrifyingly bulge out of their sockets. A teathy, manic smile covers his face as he pumps his arms through the air. He’s tailing them, gaining on them and Sooyoung screams at the top of her lungs.

Sooyoung wills every cell in her body to run faster.

Her father lunges at his daughter’s top, gripping a sizable amount of fabric in his hand and Sooyoung trips to the ground, twisting Jiwoo’s wrist hard and bringing her down with her as she cries out in pain.

After crashing to the floor, Sooyoung looks up for Jiwoo - only to find the vacancy of the parking garage.

Sooyoung is screaming bloody murder for help, her strident cries ringing through the empty structure. Her father steps closer and closer to her with those white eyes, grinning as she crawls backward panickedly.

But the *gun*, she feels it against her body as she scrapes against the concrete, grasping for it and panickedly aiming it at her father standing above her. She holds the gun directly at her father, sobbing hard now as her forefinger moves to the trigger.

Her father looks terrifyingly deranged, but jumps at the sight. His bulging eyes dart around, and crawls animalistically to Sooyoung’s mother’s station wagon off to the side. Sooyoung is choking on her own tears; she couldn’t pull the trigger if she tried.

The car is starting to move again, driving away from her crumpled on the dirty floor. Sooyoung’s mother revs the station wagon, and drives them away. Sooyoung cries while feeling some inkling of relief.

Until she sees the car turn around the bend. The blinding high beam shines straight at her.

Sooyoung cannot think as her parents' car is coming straight toward her body on the concrete.

She is trying her hardest to lift her legs, but they feel terrifyingly weak, as if she were attempting to lift a car. The lights become blinding, and Sooyoung sees her mother behind the wheel, fearless.

"Sooyoung! Sooyoung!" Jiwoo cries suddenly from behind her, before the edge of the station wagon carves through her body at full force and Sooyoung lets out the most blood-curdling scream.

"Sooyoung!" Jiwoo calls as she shakes the business student awake. The time is 4:23AM.

Jiwoo had stirred in her girlfriend's bed to Sooyoung sobbing in her sleep, tossing around in pain. Sooyoung's motions were so intense that Jiwoo had no idea *what* was going on. A panic attack? A seizure?

"Sooyoung, please wake up, you're scaring me-"

Sooyoung cries terribly hard into her palms, eyes screwed shut and hysterical even though she's already awoken. Through the near darkness of the university residence, Jiwoo watches in confusion as Sooyoung is gasping for air between sobs.

Jiwoo carefully pulls Sooyoung's trembling figure into her warm arms. "Shhh, shhh it's okay," Jiwoo comforts, and shuts her eyes in pain as Sooyoung is choking, coughing because the slender Harvard student is crying too hard to breathe. "Sooyoung, you're safe..." Jiwoo blinks the sleep out of her own eyes as she warms her girlfriend's back.

Sooyoung is trying to contain herself - she's *trying* to, but the deranged expression of her father is so clear it's almost as if he's in this very room peering at them from right above her. She instinctively hides her sobbing face in Jiwoo's chest at the thought, but does her best to focus on Jiwoo's soft, familiar voice.

"Shhhh, I'm here okay baby, it was just a dream," Jiwoo whispers worriedly, running her fingers through Sooyoung's jet black hair. "You're home, you're home it's okay..."

Poor Sooyoung is trembling, so Jiwoo reaches for her comforter to cover the both of them. As she tugs it, her cellphone falls and clatters to the floor.

Sooyoung shrieks in unadulterated fear at the loud noise, making Jiwoo's stomach drop with guilt. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry-"

Sooyoung is in shambles, sounding unsure, afraid, and weak - everything that Sooyoung *isn't*. "They're here to hurt me," she whispers in a teary panic.

"No, no one's here to hurt you," Jiwoo reassures, feeling her heart split open. "No one's gonna hurt you at all," she says protectively, despite not knowing at all who 'they' are. It didn't matter, Jiwoo elected, because she'd never let them near her girlfriend.

Sooyoung can't stop repeating '*I don't want to, I don't want to,*' and shaking her head profusely.

"Sooyoung," Jiwoo starts, breaking apart their embrace and taking her girlfriend's crying face into her hands. Jiwoo's heart pangs at the sight of her, choking on her own teary breaths and relentless

sobs. "Hey," Jiwoo whispers calmly.

Sooyoung looks up at her.

"No one is going to hurt you," Jiwoo stresses every word with the utmost care, like a prayer. "I promise. We're safe here." Sooyoung nods into her hands biting her lip to stop her crying. "I'm here with you, okay? Only a bad dream."

Sooyoung's terror slowly subsides as pure embarrassment takes its place. "I'm s-sorry--"

Jiwoo takes her into her arms again to hold tight, wishing she could take her pain away. With sweet nothings and even more patience, Sooyoung stops crying, finally over the recurring night terror.

"It's alright Sooyoungie," Jiwoo whispers in the dark. Sooyoung's sleepy eyes widen; no one's ever called her that before.

She stares into the dark limp in Jiwoo's arms, feeling utterly humiliated. Sooyoung cannot even count how many times Jiwoo has slept over on one hand, as their relationship had just begun. Unloading this episode on Jiwoo is... far too much.

Sooyoung pines at the thought of Jiwoo slowly parting ways with her, fleeing as this is much more than she signed up for.

What she doesn't know though is that Jiwoo doesn't mind at all. Her hand rubs up and down Sooyoung's back over the comforter, as she presses gentle kisses to her head.

Sooyoung revels in the feeling of safety, closing her eyes to bask in it. She doesn't remember the last time she's been held - probably as a baby. It is sinfully blissful, like something that wasn't meant for her but she takes guiltily anyway.

"Sooyoung--"

Sooyoung anticipates the question before it's even asked. "I'm sorry but I can't talk about it," she says, defensive and more icy than intended. Her voice sounds ridiculous now, all its charm being replaced with nasal stuffiness.

"That's not what I was going to say," Jiwoo whispers softly, still delicately running her fingers through Sooyoung's hair. She's quiet for a few more beats. The sprinklers outside the graduate residence turn on, signifying 5AM.

"I just want you to know you can tell me anything," Sooyoung hears Jiwoo whisper above her with a tenderness that Sooyoung has never, ever known existed until this moment. "You never, ever have to talk about this, but you always can." Jiwoo closes her eyes as she rests on Sooyoung, bundled together.

Sooyoung bites her lip hard to hold in more tears. But she fails as they come flowing out from her eyes, and she cries noiselessly in Jiwoo's arms. Jiwoo doesn't notice until Sooyoung is a sniffling mess all over again. "I'm so sorry for waking you Jiwoo," she whines quietly.

"Shhh, it's no problem okay Sooyoungie?" Jiwoo presses another kiss to her temple. "You're safe now."

The two of them stay glued together until the sun slowly begins to creep up on the horizon. Despite

her tired eyes, Jiwoo doesn't let herself sleep until she knows Sooyoung is sleeping peacefully, still cradled in her arms.

Truthfully, Jiwoo is scared - who is her girlfriend running from? The Mafia? Is she some type of sexy drug mule?!? As she watches Sooyoung snoozing with a tranquil expression, Jiwoo smiles softly. *Eh, Jiwoo dismisses internally. Who cares if she is. She's perfect.*

She holds Sooyoung closer to her chest, relieved that the nightmare is over.

Easily, she drifts back off to sleep, joining her future wife in dreamland.

Sooyoung unlocks the door to her apartment giggle, her keys and leftovers in one hand with Jiwoo's fingers intertwined in her other.

Jungeun Kim, moody as ever, trudges in behind them.

They had just gotten back from a restaurant to watch a movie, completing one of their many hangout nights (or as Jiwoo liked to call them, threeways... neither of the other girls were very fond of this nickname and objected frequently, but Jiwoo was Jiwoo.) However, Jungeun felt like she was about to have a mental breakdown.

It wasn't that she was jealous of either Jiwoo nor Sooyoung. They were both incredibly far from anything she ever wanted in a woman. But that was exactly the problem.

Lately, everyone seemed to have something *wrong* with them that made Jungeun lose interest completely. It's become increasingly harder for the math whiz to not feel like the loneliest person on Earth.

A squeal interrupts Jungeun from her thoughts as she looks over the giant smile plastered on Jiwoo's face as Sooyoung playfully places a few kisses on her cheeks. They were just goofing around in the kitchen as Sooyoung was attempting to put the leftovers into the fridge.

Hanging around Jiwoo all the time wasn't making it much easier for Jungeun. It would be okay if it were just her and Jiwoo, but her best friend and Sooyoung had been attached at the hip ever since they met all those months ago. The couple was exhaustingly disgusting no matter what they were doing. Even when they were just at the local diner a few hours ago, they just *had* to share the same side of the booth... and the drink... and the same french fry, or else one of them would've thrown a fit.

Jungeun was so happy that her friend had found someone so perfect for her, no matter how unlikely that match could be. But it only reinforced the idea that if Jungeun were meant for love, she would have found her soulmate by now like everyone else.

(Meanwhile, Jinsol Jung is humming along to "Genie In A Bottle" by Cristina Aguilera, cleaning her fish tank in one of the other Harvard graduate residences a few blocks down. Though Jungeun will never meet her - at least, not for another few years...

But that's a story for another day.)

"What movie do you want to watch Jungie?" Jiwoo asks, suddenly remembering that it wasn't just Sooyoung and herself in the apartment. Sooyoung looks expectantly at her as well.

"Um-" Jungeun can't even get a word out before Sooyoung interrupts.

“Oh! I rented that movie about the sad boat. I have a few days before I have to take it back to BlockBuster. Should we watch that?” She asks, clearly only addressing Jiwoo.

“The... Titanic?” Jungeun asks, making Jiwoo gasp.

“YES! That’s perfect! Come on Jungie let’s get some blankets. Baby, will you make the popcorn? And break out some wine?” Jiwoo asks Sooyoung, who nods immediately.

Jungeun is then dragged to the living room, thoughts of ever escaping the torture of romance flying out of the window.

The movie isn’t even over before Jungeun starts sobbing so violently that they have to pause the movie.

Sooyoung had brought over two bottles of wine at the beginning of the film which were now both empty. However, she and Jiwoo hadn’t even finished their first glass. Jungeun however...

“I AM SO *ALONEEEEE!*” Jungeun screams nasally into the night.

Jiwoo leaves her position cuddling Sooyoung on the recliner and joins Jungeun on the couch. The girl hugs Jungeun and Jiwoo’s friend buries her face into the other girl’s shoulder.

“Jesus, are you alright?” Sooyoung asks, a little too bluntly than she intended.

Jiwoo shoots Sooyoung a look and then pats Jungeun on the back.

“Oh sweetie, you’re not alone! You have us!” Jiwoo says, but that only seems to make Jungeun cry harder.

“I’M NEVER GOING TO FIND LOVE!” she yells between sobs. “EVERYONE IS TERRIBLE AND I GUESS I’M JUST *UNLOVABLE!*”

Jiwoo slaps Jungeun on the arm, causing her wails to grow louder.

“Never, say you’re unlovable ever again. I’ll kill you, and then kill myself because I can’t live without you.” Jiwoo says sternly and a little too seriously.

Jungeun begins breathing so heavily that she coughs a few times and lets out a disgustingly wet hiccup. Suddenly, her cheeks are puffed out and she sprints to the restroom.

“Oh god.” Sooyoung says, following Jiwoo who has immediately rushed to accompany her friend.

Jiwoo holds Jungeun’s hair up as she vomits profusely into the toilet bowl.

“I’m never going to have a soulmate,” Jungeun cries when she gets a moment to breathe.

“Jungeun you’re just a romantic! Not a *hopeless* romantic! What about that girl we set you up with the other day? With that pretty girl from the bar? Um...”

“Rosé.” Sooyoung confirms, her arms crossed as she leans against the bathroom door frame.

“Right! What about her? She seemed nice!”

Jungeun groans, wincing at the taste of her dinner in her mouth. “She reminds me of myself,”

Jungeun cringes.

“YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL TO DATE YOURSELF! YOU’RE A WONDERFUL PERSON-”

“Shhh!” Sooyoung giggles, trying to quiet her screaming girlfriend as Jungeun clasps her hands around her ears.

“What? Isn’t she like, majoring in singing?” Sooyoung snorts, making Jungeun glare at her from the toilet seat.

“I just had a feeling.” Jungeun responds.

“You based your entire opinion on her on a... feeling?” Jiwoo asks, not trying to judge, but honestly being a little judgy.

“I’M NEVER GOING TO BE IN LOOOOOOVE!” Jungeun ignores, yelling again while Sooyoung sighs.

“Okay get someone completely different next time,” Jiwoo nods. “Noted.”

“I DON’T WANT IT!”

“You know what...” Jiwoo says, taking a deep breath. “I really didn’t want to resort to this... But for one night and one night only you can join Sooyoung and I in the bedroom for a threesome.”

“What?!” Sooyoung says, definitely not a fan of the idea. It seems that Jungeun feels the same, as she has just upchucked her guts into the toilet once again.

“Sooyoung, she’s sad! Can’t she be our third for once?” Jiwoo asks, still keeping Jungeun’s hair up for her as she continues to vomit into the toilet.

“Jiwoo no!” Sooyoung says, and Jungeun points up to her in order to get across that she agrees with the taller woman. Jungeun spits into the bowl once more.

“You know I don’t like sharing meals...” Sooyoung says suggestively, making Jiwoo squeal and Jungeun puke once more. The couple begin to wriggle their eyebrows at each other.

“I need to go home,” Jungeun says, but she is clearly not in any state to move one inch, much less downstairs to her own room.

“Look, we can sleep in the bed together and Sooyoung can sleep on the couch. How about that?” Jiwoo offers, making Sooyoung pout.

“Okaaaaaay,” Jungeun slurs, her face sideways on the seat.

“Come on, let’s get you into bed.” Jiwoo says, picking her best friend off the floor, making a mental note to grab her some water and a bucket before she lied down herself.

“Wooming.” Sooyoung pouts as the girl passes her in the doorway, an upset look on her face.

“Baby, you know I’ll make it up to you okay? Just do this for me...” Jiwoo whispers as she trails a finger down Sooyoung’s arm that makes her shiver.

“Alright.” Sooyoung says before receiving a massive kiss on the cheek. She couldn’t resist Jiwoo even if she tried... Her girlfriend was much too tempting.

Plus, Jiwoo was one to keep her word... and boy did she make up for it.

It's a night Sooyoung is spending studying when she hears Jiwoo cry for the first time.

The time is around 1AM, the business student reviewing tirelessly for her midterm examination the next day when her cellphone begins to ring.

"Jiwoo?"

Sooyoung immediately hears her sniffing at the other end of the line, and puts her textbook down.

"Jiwoo?" she asks worriedly, her mind immediately assuming the worst. "Are you safe? Did something happen?"

"No, Sooyoungie I'm okay," Jiwoo says with a clogged nose. *"I just... I just wanted to hear your voice."*

"Oh. Okay," Sooyoung says understandingly, leaning up against the wall of her graduate residence. "Why are you crying?"

There is a pregnant pause void with silence, to the point where Sooyoung thinks the line may have cut. "Hello?"

"I've been crying since earlier and I can't sleep."

Sooyoung's face falls. "What's the matter baby," she asks softly.

"It's humiliating."

Sooyoung smiles. "Can't be that bad," she says, knowing Jiwoo's eccentric antics were never something she was ashamed about (and rightfully so).

"No, it is and I'm just... it's.." Jiwoo trails off.

Sooyoung leans her back up against the wall with her phone to her ear, her head rolling back patiently. "Are you gonna tell me sweetheart?"

Jiwoo pauses again, and Sooyoung can only hear her endearing sniffing.

"I failed my board exam for the second time," Jiwoo says.

"What exam?" Sooyoung asks, alarmed. "To teach?"

She doesn't get an answer; Sooyoung takes it as a yes.

"You've failed it before?" Sooyoung asks gently. She didn't know that about Jiwoo, only that she was studying for it.

"I didn't tell you the first time, I just- you're so smart Sooyoungie and I didn't want to embarrass you-"

Sooyoung's heart sinks; Jiwoo could never embarrass her in a million years. "Jiwoo."

"But I fucked it up again- I'm just-"

“By how much?” Sooyoung interrupts her crying girlfriend.

“...*What?*”

“How many points?”

Jiwoo rustles around at the other end, locating the mailed sheet of paper with her results. “*I only scored fifty-five percent.*”

Sooyoung’s stomach drops. *Ouch.*

“Oh Jiwoo-”

“*Yeah, I know Sooyoung, okay, I know I’m stupid.*” Jiwoo says, and the self-deprecation stings Sooyoung’s soul so painfully it physically hurts.

“Don’t *ever* say that Jiwoo,” Sooyoung says with overflowing conviction. “You are not stupid.”

“*Well what would you call it then,*” Jiwoo says quietly into the line. “*I failed again and I could never be like you in... Harvard. And you know what they say. Those who can’t do, teach.*”

“Stop it,” Sooyoung says, simply not being able to stand for it. Coming from the best girl she’s ever met, it’s agonizing. “Jiwoo, you’re not stupid. I know stupid. And Harvard doesn’t mean shit,” Sooyoung says sharply. “I overheard my classmate the other day say ‘I gave a homeless man \$100 so he could get a ride home’.”

Jiwoo laughs melodiously into the phone through her tears, and Sooyoung’s fear is assuaged just a tad. “*Really?*”

“Yes. We’re all just pretentious, people-pleasing freaks. None of us hold a candle to you.” Sooyoung says honestly. It’s probably the sweetest thing she’s been to anyone. “I don’t want to hear it, okay Jiwoo? You are *brilliant*.” Sooyoung insists passionately, meaning it in every which way.

“...*Thank you, honey,*” Jiwoo snuffles. “*But it still hurts.*”

“Can I help you study Jiwooming? Please? I know how badly you want this and I just want to help,” she offers, despite being busy enough as is. “You could come at... Say, eight in the evening every day and we could work on it-”

Sooyoung is interrupted by Jiwoo blowing her nose loudly into a Kleenex at the other end of the line. “*If only I had more time,*” Jiwoo weeps miserably.

“What? What do you mean by that?”

“*Well I didn’t finish the test...*”

“...How much did you do?”

Jiwoo blows her nose again, hard. “*A little over half...*”

“Baby!” Sooyoung nearly yells into the phone. “A little over half is 55%!”

“...*Sooyoungie I’m not a math major.*”

Sooyoung laughs into the phone. “Jiwoo from what you’re telling me, you would have gotten a

near perfect score if you just had more time to complete the test.”

Silence.

“*Really?*”

“Yes!” Sooyoung smiles proudly. “Please Jiwoo. Come over and I’ll practice with you, okay? I’ll be happy to! I’ll learn something new too.”

Jiwoo is overwhelmed by the unexpected kindness of her new sweetheart. “*Oh Sooyoungie, you don’t have to do that-*”

“I want to,” Sooyoung says immediately. “It’s the least I can do. This is important to you. And you are the most important person to me.”

Jiwoo is now sobbing again at the other end of the line.

“Jiwoo! Why are you crying?!”

“*Sooyoungie, I can’t ask that of you-*”

“Please,” Sooyoung calls into the phone. “Let me.”

Sooyoung doesn’t see it, but Jiwoo is smiling so much, feeling the weight of the world lifted off her shoulders.

The sun sets a warm orange on the somewhat secluded hill where Sooyoung and Jiwoo are having a picnic date.

The two women rest near each other, stuffed from Jiwoo’s fantastic cooking. They lay up to look at the clouds, their hands intertwined. Sooyoung rubs her thumb along the soft skin of Jiwoo’s hand thinking of their time together.

Jiwoo had spontaneously decided to have this date, calling to ask if she would meet her at this lovely hill. Sooyoung immediately agreed to come along, never passing up an opportunity to spend time with her.

“What do you want after all this?” Jiwoo asks rather suddenly. She turns her head and Sooyoung does the same so they are looking into each other’s eyes.

“What do you mean?” Sooyoung asks, suddenly a little nervous.

“I just mean... like after you graduate. What do you want to do? Like, what’s your dream? I realized I’ve never asked.” Jiwoo says, her eyes bright from the reflection of the pinks and reds in the sky.

Sooyoung thinks for a few minutes. The silence is comfortable as she finally formulates an answer.

“My dream is...” Sooyoung thinks long and hard.

For a long time, she wasn’t privileged enough to even have dreams.

“My dream to be so independent that I never have to lean on anyone for support.” Sooyoung

breathes longingly. “To live in a big, beautiful house. In a safe neighborhood, with a nice partner... To be successful in my field.”

Jiwoo lifts her head onto her hand that she’s propped up with her elbow.

“Very realistic I think.” Jiwoo says wistfully, a soft smile on her face as she runs a finger over Sooyoung’s face to move a strand of hair.

“What about you?”

Jiwoo smiles at the clouds.

“I want to be... happy. I want to positively impact as many lives I can. And I want to be unforgettable. But more than anything... I want a family of my own.”

Sooyoung nods at Jiwoo’s reasonable dream, but the other young woman is not finished.

“Also, if I’m being honest, I want to have my own cooking show and be the best chef of all time... I want to have a battle on *Emeril Live* and win. Maybe bake a cake in SPACE.” She says excitedly.

“That got intense quite quickly.” Sooyoung lets out a chuckle, pinching one of Jiwoo’s cheeks. “You think you can do that all in one lifetime?”

“Well,” Jiwoo says, lying back down. The gentle wind blows the clouds, leisurely sliding along the grapefruit-colored sky. “The best dreams aren’t always about being attainable, I think,” she says, gazing at the clouds.

“They’re just something we should have to give us hope... Without hope, we wouldn’t try.” Jiwoo smiles. “So why not set our hopes high?”

“What if we set our hopes high and we fail?” Sooyoung asks genuinely.

“Nobody’s ever been special by playing it safe, Sooyoung,” Jiwoo admits blissfully.

Sooyoung stares at her in admiration.

“I’m gonna tell my students that on my first day of class.”

Sooyoung is immediately puzzled. “First day of class...?”

Jiwoo looks at her in shock like she’s just spilled the beans. “Oh Sooyoung, I was gonna surprise you with a cake, but... I passed the exam!”

Sooyoung cheers as she tackles her girlfriend in the strongest hug she’s ever given. Not too long ago, she would have never given a hug at all.

“I’m so proud of you!” Sooyoung cheers, like a child once again as Jiwoo laughs against her in happiness. At the sound of Jiwoo’s happy cheers, the business student truly asks herself-

How did I get so lucky?

Sooyoung and Jiwoo are so... *different* in the most enthralling way. Of course Jiwoo is adorably beautiful, and their sex life is electric, but... What Jiwoo added to Sooyoung’s life were things she never would have known she needed. Kindness, generosity, warmth, love...

Love.

Taking one look at her now, laying against the grass looking like the happiest girl in the world, Sooyoung knows it to be true.

“I love you,” Sooyoung declares, unable to hold it in any longer. Jiwoo’s smile turns into an expression of shock.

Sooyoung doesn’t even wait for Jiwoo to respond properly before she thinks to herself that she’s made a mistake. The woman sits up immediately, realizing that that was *not*, in *any way* how that was supposed to go. And certainly not this soon.

Sooyoung is sweating already, and Jiwoo not saying anything has only made it worse.

“Sooyoung...” Jiwoo says, not sure what to say in response to the sudden confession.

“Jiwoo- I’m-I’m sorry. I have to get going.” Sooyoung says, her cheeks filled with embarrassment.

Of course she wouldn’t say it back, was Sooyoung *crazy*? Someone as wondrous as Jiwoo would never fall in love with her.

“I’m- I’m so sorry Jiwoo.”

“Sooyoung!” Jiwoo calls, but the Harvard student is already walking down the hill.

Sooyoung forces herself not to look back, unable to bask in her own humiliation.

Maybe Sooyoung should stick to attainable dreams from now on.

Sooyoung is walking up the stairs to her apartment the next day as the night begins to take over the sky outside.

Sooyoung had come home immediately after the ridiculous outburst that was her confessing to Jiwoo that she was in love with her. She forced herself to sleep at such an early time to avoid excessive rumination on the awkward situation. Now, she was coming home after her busiest day of the week, one full of classes and a long shift at her new internship.

Sooyoung was thankful for the packed schedule, it gave her less time to overthink it. But now she was unlocking the door, ready to drown her sorrows in comfort wings.

Except when she opens the door, there are candles lit in various areas of her apartment. Furniture is pushed to the sides so more space is open and a blanket from their picnic is spread out on the floor. Two champagne glasses sit neatly on top of it.

“Wh-” Sooyoung starts, but her breath hitches when she sees someone walking towards her.

Jiwoo emerges from the kitchen, seemingly a little nervous. (Sooyoung had given her a spare key, seeing that she was here nearly every day.) Jiwoo figured it was time to put it to good use.

“We never got to finish our picnic last night.” She says, reaching out to hold the hands of her stupefied future wife.

Jiwoo pulls Sooyoung in closer. “And you never let me respond to what you said either.”

“Jiwoo-”

“I love you too.” Jiwoo announces passionately. “I’ve loved you since the night I met you, Sooyoung.”

Sooyoung is frozen.

“You do?”

Jiwoo lets a small smile form on her face. “Of course I do. You just... Left before I could even say anything.” She tilts her head and raises an eyebrow.

Sooyoung’s cheeks flush red. “I’m not good with... Rejection.”

Jiwoo’s eyes make sure to meet Sooyoung’s at this moment. “Whatever you went through in the past is not who I am, not who we are. You shouldn’t be scared of how anyone reacts to your feelings. Especially not me.”

Jiwoo cups Sooyoung’s face and the taller woman leans into her girlfriend’s hand. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to be guarded. Not with me. You don’t need to run away, Sooyoung, because I would never run away from you.”

Sooyoung looks at Jiwoo in amazement, still unable to stomach the confession.

“You love me?”

“I love you,” Jiwoo repeats. “I love you, I love you, I love you,” and with every proclamation Sooyoung’s heart sings.

She doesn’t know what to do, really, other than kiss her with all that she has.

Sooyoung has been getting very angry post-it notes on her apartment door for the entire academic year now, ever since she started seeing Jiwoo. All of them have been along the lines of **“FUCK LESS LOUDLY!”** When she finds out that it’s one Jungeun Kim who lives directly below her and slamming the notes, she snickers, and decides that maybe for her second and final year business school it’s time for a change in housing.

So when Sooyoung suddenly asks Jiwoo if she’d like to move in with her, right in the middle of admiring Jiwoo while she was baking a new recipe of cookies, Jiwoo accepts with exploding cheers. Even though Jiwoo was practically already living with her already.

The couple is reclining together now, on their stomachs as Sooyoung’s ridiculously thick laptop is open in front of them with listings for apartments in the wider Boston area. Sooyoung needs to finish up her MBA program here, so they’re staying local.

“Oh, look at that one!” Jiwoo points at a listing of a lovely apartment, ogling the photos with stars in her eyes. “Look at that kitchen! I don’t have to bake in your tiny little oven anymore!”

Sooyoung pouts at her. “I like my oven.”

“That’s because you’re not the one using it.” Jiwoo tuts, then taps through the other photos, admiring the spacious bedroom, large kitchen, and gorgeous city view. “Wow, I love it! It’s perfect for us!”

Sooyoung agrees, until she glances at the price. “Oh, no...” Sooyoung says sadly.

“What is it?”

“It’s out of our budget.” Sooyoung sighs sadly, hating that she had to break it to Jiwoo. Getting an apartment in this area was ridiculously expensive, especially considering all the lingering wealth around both Harvard University and MIT, two of the most esteemed institutions in the world. To top it off, Sooyoung and Jiwoo only had so much money to spare.

“Oh,” Jiwoo says, unable to hide her disappointment, but still attempting to be chipper. “Well that’s okay honey!” she says sweetly.

Sooyoung’s frown persists as she switches between the browser tabs they have open. The apartments were... nice, but admittedly a bit cramped. None of the kitchens could compete with the example Jiwoo had fawned over. Sooyoung gazed again at the apartment Jiwoo had just fallen in love with, trying to do the mental mathematics that would allow for the money for this apartment. She comes up short every way she spins it.

She is reminded time and time again of her parents at the dining table, stressfully trying to come up with the finances. Then, when Sooyoung was supposedly asleep, she could hear their conversation’s volume get louder and louder...

Jiwoo watches her empathetically, feeling a bit bad for showing her excitement. “It’s okay Sooyoungie,” she smiles, trying to get Sooyoung’s mind off of whatever she was thinking of. “Those pictures were probably fake... There’s probably rats in the actual place or something!”

Sooyoung smiles weakly, then it fades back into her troubled, pensive expression. “...I want you to be happy.”

“Hey,” Jiwoo cups Sooyoung’s cheek, sensing her dismay and guiding her face away from the screen. “I am happy,” she says simply, sincerely. “*You* make me happy.”

Sooyoung looks into her kind eyes, then looks down with a defeated sigh. Then she looks at Jiwoo’s beautiful face, those eyes that only see the best in everyone and her. “You deserve only the best. More than anyone.”

Jiwoo smiles at her future wife’s grandiose claim. “And I have it,” she says honestly, rubbing a thumb over Sooyoung’s cheek tenderly, making Sooyoung melt.

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been more sure about anything else in my life,” Jiwoo whispers, taking Sooyoung in. “I love you so much, and I-” Jiwoo sighs in contentment, stroking some stray black hairs away from Sooyoung’s face. “I’ve never felt this way about anyone before,” Jiwoo admits.

Sooyoung meets Jiwoo’s uncharacteristically timid eyes. “I love you too,” she says.

Jiwoo moves closer to plant soft kisses on Sooyoung’s forehead, then her nose, and her cheeks. “You are all I need.” she says honestly.

“Is that a promise?” Sooyoung asks, with butterflies fluttering in her stomach.

“Yes,” Jiwoo says confidently. “I promise. They’re all perfect as long as it’s me and you.”

Sooyoung believes her. But one day, she will make sure that she never has to worry about a home

being out of budget again.

And she's getting Jiwoo that big kitchen.

By the time they've already gotten themselves their tiny apartment in metropolitan Boston, Sooyoung is even busier beginning her last year of business school. The couple had moved in together happily, making the place their own with their furniture. The core items of a household have already been put into place: their shared bed, closets, sofa, television and more.

It's a cozy studio loft, with the bathroom being the only partitioned room. The trade off was more space for a nicer kitchen, which Sooyoung gladly gave up for Jiwoo. Sooyoung had also promised to keep things much tidier, and kept it up swimmingly.

On this chilly September morning, Jiwoo decorates their little home to brighten up the space. Currently, she unpacks the boxes for the living room area. She slices open a box of Sooyoung's movies, many of which Sooyoung had kept from Blockbuster (including the one they'd watched on their first date).

Jiwoo hums some Britney Spears to herself as she carefully retrieves DVD cases to line the cabinet below their television. As she lines them up and grabs each case with her free hand, she stops upon feeling something differently shaped.

She peers into the box, and sees a lone VHS tape. No covering, no label, simply a tape within a thin slip.

Jiwoo, prying and curious, knows that she probably shouldn't. But what the hell, they were living together anyway. Sooyoung and her were happily in love. What could it hurt to see what's on the tape?

Jiwoo presses the tape through the larger slot in their 90's media player below the television. She flickers the thick and heavy television on, as a picture starts to construct on their screen.

A tall, slender girl with perfectly straight black hair stands in a vacant room, barely lit. The child is deathly thin. She looks no older than twelve.

She walks back to show her full body, then begins to speak - first in Korean. With her facial features too blurry to be discernible, Jiwoo's eyes widen in shock when the paper thin girl's voice rings familiar.

"Hello, my name is Sooyoung Ha," the child says, switching to slow, accent-ridden English. "Here is my audition video for the dance competition."

Jiwoo's mouth falls open as the girl flicks on a track of classical music, and begins to dance.

Sooyoung, on tape, appears to execute a contemporary dance routine to a soft classical piece. As she extends her long limbs in the elegant expressive dance, Jiwoo is mesmerized. Young Sooyoung isn't the perfect dancer, but she leaps through the air with the learned precision of a child who practiced extensively. Jiwoo's heart drops as she can make out each and every one of Sooyoung's ribs whenever her shirt rides up.

The floorwork is impeccable, everything about it-

"What are you doing?" Sooyoung's voice ruptures through the air in an almost accusatory manner.

Jiwoo jumps at the sound, and turns to see her girlfriend just having entered the apartment.

“This is *you* Sooyoungie?” Jiwoo asks in awe, making Sooyoung fill with panic. “This is amazing, you’re an amazing dancer why didn’t you tell me-”

Sooyoung interrupts her by walking in front of Jiwoo, her forefinger immediately shutting the television down. Hastily and aggressively, the business student shoves her fingers into the VHS slot to pop the tape back out. Jiwoo’s heart falls. She must have offended her. “Oh baby, I’m sorry-”

Sooyoung rattles the tape into its container slip then drops it into her book bag. Not angry, just... embarrassed?

“I’m sorry Sooyoung, I was just sorting your DVDs and I- I got curious...” Jiwoo says guiltily as her girlfriend still refuses to look at her, closing up her book bag. Sooyoung shoves the tape below everything else in the bag as if it were the most humiliating thing in the world.

“I’m sorry... I shouldn’t have-”

“Please don’t do that again,” Sooyoung cuts her off almost strenuously. The Harvard student’s expression is unreadable, as she gets back up to gather some of her other paperwork.

“...Are you angry with me?” Jiwoo asks gently with her heart in her throat. Sooyoung has never acted like this before.

Sooyoung is quiet for a few seconds as she continues to sort her belongings with her back turned, like she’s too ashamed to show her face. “...No, Jiwoo, I’m not angry with you.” she sighs, relieving Jiwoo. But Jiwoo can sense Sooyoung’s tension all the way from the couch. “But there are some things I really do not want to share. Not right now. Please respect my privacy.”

Jiwoo looks at her lover sympathetically. She *knows* her girlfriend is private, but she just wants her to let her in. She knows everywhere Sooyoung likes to be kissed the most, exactly what shatters her steely facade into childlike laughter, the subtle difference in the way Sooyoung smiles when she doesn’t want to smile at all.

But Jiwoo knows nothing about what makes Sooyoung, *Sooyoung*. Sooyoung has told Jiwoo she loved her, hell, moved in with her, but Jiwoo still knows nothing about her parents, her hometown, her childhood... Every time she’s tried asking, Sooyoung always deflected the questions.

When Sooyoung looks up at Jiwoo who is still quiet, she can read her mind from the sad look on her face.

“I’m sorry. I just. I can’t.”

“It’s okay,” Jiwoo accepts patiently, against everything in her nosy mind screaming to prod. “Whenever you’re ready.” She smiles softly at her girlfriend, who looks back at her with sad, forgiving eyes.

Jiwoo actively chooses not to inquire about the fact that Sooyoung looked thinner than any twelve year old she had ever seen. “You were an excellent dancer,” Jiwoo compliments quietly, lovingly.

Sooyoung looks down at her feet. She nods, brushing off the comment.

“I have to run off to a meeting with my colleagues,” she says, and Jiwoo smiles a little because Sooyoung is the only one in the world ready for industry enough to call her classmates *colleagues*.

“I love you.” Sooyoung makes sure to look her girlfriend in the eye when she says so. “And it looks beautiful in here,” Sooyoung adds, referring to the soft lights and homey decor Jiwoo has set up since she left in the morning.

“Thank you. I love you too.” Jiwoo looks at her understandingly. “Be safe,” she says, before Sooyoung is out the door leaving her alone with the last of the moving boxes.

“I want to be honest with you,” Sooyoung says randomly two days later, making Jiwoo’s head perk up. The couple are just about to dig into dinner on this snowy evening, and as Sooyoung was taking out the china she decided that she didn’t want to keep anything from Jiwoo any longer.

And she figured, despite how hard it would be, Jiwoo deserves to know.

Jiwoo notices the emotional constipation written all over Sooyoung’s face, like she wants to say something so *bad* but just can’t. Jiwoo lowers the volume of the television to barely audible. “You cross your legs when you poop too?”

“What?”

“What?” Jiwoo says back, as if she never said anything at all.

“No,” Sooyoung sighs with a little laugh, putting down the porcelain plates gently as she makes her way over to her girlfriend on their couch.

“Wait- do you not like my cupcakes,” Jiwoo asks with shimmering eyes, saddening herself with just the thought.

“No- No baby,” Sooyoung says, taking Jiwoo’s hand into hers and kissing the back of her palm. “I love your cakes so much,” she insists truthfully, while Jiwoo wriggles her eyebrows suggestively making Sooyoung laugh.

“Okay,” Jiwoo says with her kind smile, brushing some hair away from Sooyoung’s fiercely beautiful face. “Be honest with me.”

Sooyoung sighs deeply. “The dance tape,” she starts.

“Sooyoungie you don’t have to tell me anything okay, I overstepped.”

“No, no,” Sooyoung rubs Jiwoo’s hand in her lap. “I want to-... I want to tell you about... it,” Sooyoung says shakily. She’s never told anyone about her relationship with dancing before. Well, she’s never had anyone to share *anything* personal with, other than Jiwoo.

Since Sooyoung had snapped at her girlfriend for finding the tape, she had been thinking nonstop about whether or not she should tell her. But if not Jiwoo than who else? Jiwoo was the woman she loved more than anyone else in the world, and she deserved to know about her past. How could she expect to know everything about Jiwoo without Jiwoo knowing something as simple as Sooyoung’s own childhood. Then again, Sooyoung’s childhood was anything but simple.

But when she took one look at Jiwoo, she felt safe and comforted... she knew there was no true reason to hide anything from her.

Jiwoo’s face lights up at Sooyoung bringing her walls down just a tad for her. But the way Sooyoung looks like she just *can’t talk*, Jiwoo feels guilty.

“Sooyoungie,” Jiwoo says, moving their hands so she holds Sooyoung’s in both of hers. “I-”

“It was for a dance competition.” Sooyoung laments quietly. She exhales as Jiwoo gives her her undivided attention. “I never sent it in. My parents said I looked something out of a freak show for the bony and disproportionate.”

“Oh Sooyoung, that’s *not* true-”

“I tried to dance once more after that.” Sooyoung closes her eyes. “I could not.”

A long pause passes as Jiwoo does her best to provide comfort through physical touch.

“Jiwoo I am not from...” Sooyoung’s voice falters, but she forces herself to be as apathetic and formal as possible. “I... Well. As I told you already I did my undergrad here at Harvard as well. And before that I was living in South Korea.”

Jiwoo nods, rubbing her thumb over Sooyoung’s skin soothingly.

“I did not come to Harvard because I wanted to. I came to Harvard because the alternative was being disowned.” Sooyoung says flatly.

Jiwoo crinkles her eyebrows. “What do you mean?”

“My mother told me I could only apply to one university...” Sooyoung looks out of the window, not caring at all about the trees outside but unable to look at Jiwoo’s face as she tells her this. “This one.”

“But... Isn’t it nearly impossible to get in if you’re not related to alumni? Especially as an international student?” Jiwoo says, recalling what ever-ambitious Jungeun would tell her in high school as she stressfully sorted her college applications. No one from their high school had gotten into Harvard University for undergrad in decades, and Jungeun was the first (ultimately turning it down for Stanford).

“Three percent,” Sooyoung says as her heart feels heavy in her chest during the painful years. “The acceptance rate for international students to Harvard University while I was applying was three percent.”

Jiwoo’s head tilts downward as she takes it in.

“And the few they would take from South Korea were from well-regarded boarding schools. I did not go to one of those.” Sooyoung laments, still looking away from her girlfriend. “No one had ever gotten in from my school at all. It was asking the impossible of me.”

Jiwoo wants to speak, but chooses not to. Tonight, she’s not going to do the talking.

Sooyoung bites her lip as she looks down at her lap. Jiwoo thinks her girlfriend is going to say more, but she’s sitting in silence for moments passing them by.

It was heart-wrenching to Jiwoo. Her girlfriend’s precarious journey to enter one of the world’s most selective institutions at the fear of disownment? It’s terrible, emotionally abusive, and undoubtedly traumatic. Jiwoo can’t believe Sooyoung has been dealing with it all this time.

“I was going to be disowned because my parents told me they didn’t want to pay for me anymore or something...” Sooyoung says emotionlessly. “I guess I was taking up too much space as their daughter,” she nods. “And money. And food.”

“We were just very poor Jiwoo.” Sooyoung says factually. “My mother and father owned a small restaurant which the bank seized during a recession, when I was nine years old. My parents actually weren’t that terrible until around that time...

“We lost our house soon after and I moved schools. We lost apartments frequently. And... I began to... hear things. Glass shattering and...” Sooyoung trails off, watching the Massachusetts snow fall outside the window. Her eyes are entirely void of emotion.

“... My father and mother, they had... quarrels. Very loud and aggressive ones.” Sooyoung fights the tremble in her voice, the fear of sharing it still tormenting her. “Sometimes they would argue right in front of me and it would get... Violent. And... Just watching that happen...”

She doesn’t turn to face Jiwoo. But she lets herself trail off.

“I don’t have any siblings,” Sooyoung says standoffishly, changing the subject. “On the way to school there was a bad area of town. My mother told me that if I ever told anyone that my father beat her, she would take me there in the night and leave me there.

“So I didn’t speak a word of it. And every day I was so afraid that I would just... Tell someone, as if on accident, like it would just leap out of my throat...” Sooyoung says bitterly. “So I chose not to speak at all.”

Sooyoung sighs like it’s simply a minor inconvenience. She speaks like she is recounting someone else’s case study as opposed to delivering her own life story.

“They stopped being like that after about a year. When the both of them had jobs they could hold onto. I remember seeing on the news that the economy was improving. But I had gone with my mother to the hospital a few times for her injuries. These things were not easy to forget.

“Then, she began acting even crueler to me. Sometimes she would place me in closets or the bathroom for whole days and nights if I did something wrong. Sometimes for just exhibiting a mannerism that resembled my father. One time she said it was because I walked like him. She was angry at him, I suppose. She was never cruel to him, though.” Sooyoung remarks bitterly.

“She made me promise to them both that I would pay them around... Ten percent of an average well-off salary here in the U.S. So, amounting to around \$10,000 a year, I think.” Sooyoung closes her eyes in pain. “Because I owe it to them. For giving me life and... etcetera.

“When she caught me fooling around with my best friend... I received a letter in the girl’s handwriting saying that we could not continue, and that we should be ashamed of ourselves. When I was in undergrad, I found out my mother went to her home, and harassed her into writing it by threatening to tell her parents. But by then my mother had already sent me to... Counseling. Every day for at least two hours. For three months.” Sooyoung admits and hates the taste of her own story in her mouth.

“I didn’t have any friends. I only studied. I rose to the top of my secondary school because I had no other choice. And now I’m here.” Sooyoung takes a shaky breath. She only turns to Jiwoo because she’s not even sure if she’s still there.

Jiwoo is staring at her with the saddest eyes Sooyoung’s ever seen look at her, tears threatening to spill from her eyes.

“Oh Jiwoo, please don’t cry, I’m sorry,” Sooyoung pleads in a soft voice, feeling an onslaught of guilt as she moves to cup Jiwoo’s cheek.

Jiwoo immediately surges toward Sooyoung, pulling her girlfriend into a tight embrace.

“It’s alright, it’s fine Jiwoo,” Sooyoung lies apathetically, feeling very overwhelmed.

Jiwoo knows it’s not, but doesn’t say anything as she holds Sooyoung in her arms tightly. The shorter girl wills herself not to cry- she won’t, it’s the last thing Sooyoung would need right now.

Sooyoung doesn’t say anything, but eventually returns the embrace.

“I’m so sorry Sooyoung,” Jiwoo whispers in her future wife’s ear.

“Jiwoo...” Sooyoung says, understanding that her situation is... *sad* ... But it is what it is. Everyone just happened to get dealt better cards than her. These were just hers to accept.

“It’s okay,” Sooyoung says. “I’m fine, Jiwooming.”

Jiwoo doesn’t believe it for a second, and won’t let go of her.

Jiwoo has no idea what to say - how can she, when Sooyoung told her like it was someone else’s biography? She has no idea what is going through Sooyoung’s head, other than...

Other than when she woke her up with that nightmare.

How many more have there been, that Jiwoo hasn’t been here to see?

She holds Sooyoung tighter under the faint light from the kitchen.

“I will never be able to understand what any of that was like,” Jiwoo admits in the quiet, intimate space of their living room. “But I need you to know it shouldn’t have happened to you.”

“I know,” Sooyoung insists, but Jiwoo doesn’t think she does. But she won’t push.

“Thank you for telling me,” Jiwoo hides the teary tremble in her voice. “I don’t want you to feel alone,” she whispers, hitting Sooyoung to her core. “You are my best friend, Sooyoungie, and I never want you to feel that way.”

“I thought Jungeun was?”

“Both of you.” Jiwoo insists. “I have two hands.”

Sooyoung laughs, but Jiwoo can’t shake the feeling of dread. She can’t even digest everything she just heard... What more on Sooyoung’s end?

She breaks apart their embrace and gazes upon Sooyoung’s despondent face.

“But have you thought about... processing these things? By talking to someone?” Jiwoo suggests timidly.

“No, no- I don’t want- No.” Sooyoung rejects swiftly. “I’m not ready for... No. I have never even told anyone other than you.” The last thing she would ever want is more counseling.

“Okay,” Jiwoo whispers, taking Sooyoung’s hand in her own. “I’m here for you.”

“Thank you,” Sooyoung says quietly. She stares down at her feet, not saying any more, while Jiwoo suppresses the urge to hold her for a million years.

“Come to my family’s for Thanksgiving,” Jiwoo offers, attempting to help in any way she can. And the thought of Sooyoung having no one to go home to for Jiwoo’s favorite holiday makes her terribly depressed.

Sooyoung’s eyes widen. She’s never celebrated the American tradition... other than treating the day as an excuse for her to buy a bigger box of chicken wings. “Oh Jiwoo, I wouldn’t want to impose-”

“You’re not, Sooyoungie, I promise. You are the love of my life,” Jiwoo admits honestly for the very first time, making Sooyoung melt. The Harvard student looks at her with the most appreciative gaze. “And I want you to meet them. They already want to meet you. Please honey? They’ll love you so much.”

Sooyoung looks off to the side. “I don’t know.”

To counter, Jiwoo pulls these ridiculous puppy dog eyes, complete with a little pout.

“What are you doing?” Sooyoung asks, bewildered.

Jiwoo only intensifies the expression. Sooyoung feels incredibly helpless in the other girl’s adorable expression.

“Jiwoo- Do you really want me there?” she asks, making sure it wasn’t just a pity invite.

“Yes,” Jiwoo asks. “I want you, Sooyoung Ha, to meet my family. As the girl I love the most.”

“Really?” Sooyoung asks softly.

“Of course.”

Sooyoung bites the inside of her cheek, and thinks about it for only a second longer. “...Okay,” she allows, and Jiwoo erupts into cheers.

Sooyoung is the most nervous she’s ever been in her entire life.

The woman stands outside in the chilly Boston air, waiting as Jiwoo takes out some homemade cupcakes she had stored ever so carefully in the trunk of her car.

It was Thanksgiving day, and at long last, the couple have arrived at Jiwoo’s childhood home. The taller woman is dressed in her absolute best, taking certain tips from Jiwoo as to how to seem more “homey” and less business, as her girlfriend had clarified.

Sooyoung wouldn’t normally take advice from anyone when it came to fashion, but because she would be meeting Jiwoo’s family today she truly needed all of the help she could get. What the business student knew from her own family experiences was that she needed to be prim and proper at all times. So that’s what she had prepared to do; she was ready to speak the most formally she ever had in her lifetime.

There were other reasons she had to be nervous too... It wasn’t like she’s ever met anyone else older than her who was gay-friendly. However, Jiwoo had reassured her that her family were all very proud of her for who she was. Still, the Harvard student had planned to make the best first impression possible, taking all morning perfecting her natural makeup and outfit.

Jiwoo struggles to close the trunk, so Sooyoung walks over to the other side of the automobile to close it for her. Then, she takes the cupcakes from Jiwoo's arms, to both give Jiwoo a break (and to keep her hands occupied while she deals with the pressure of meeting her girlfriend's family).

"Thank you honeybear." Jiwoo says, giving her girlfriend a quick peck on the cheek. She loops her arm through Sooyoung's as they walk towards the house.

The neighborhood is picturesque American suburbia, one that Sooyoung thought only existed in movies. The house Jiwoo directs them to is one straight out of someone's American dream - classic and inviting on the peaceful cul de sac. Sooyoung takes a deep breath as Jiwoo knocks on the door. The business student's stomach is in knots. Jiwoo can sense it, and rubs her arm comfortingly. Sooyoung fights the urge to hide as she hears someone nearing the door to welcome them inside.

The door opens and in front of them stands a near carbon copy of Jiwoo, just older. Her smile is just as infectious as her own daughter's as she clasps her hands together in happiness at the sight of the couple.

"Oh everyone, Jiwoo and Sooyoung are here!" The woman shouts into the house, getting various loud and excited responses back from within.

She turns back to her daughter and immediately brings her into a hug. Jiwoo holds onto her mother tightly. "Mom! I missed you so much!"

"Oh, it's only been two weeks sweetie!" her mother adds, making Sooyoung's eyes widen. She hasn't seen her mother in years. "You look absolutely beautiful!" The woman says, and Sooyoung couldn't agree more. Jiwoo was wearing a lovely little dress that Sooyoung had saved up to buy her for her birthday. It was worth every penny seeing Jiwoo pull it off the way she was.

The mother turns to her daughter's girlfriend with kind, excited eyes. "And you must be the Sooyoung my Jiwoo won't stop talking about!"

Sooyoung inhales, holding out her free hand timidly. "Hello," the Korean says in the softest voice Jiwoo has ever heard her use. "It's such a pleasure to meet you."

Instead of getting a handshake, Sooyoung is immediately engulfed into the arms of her girlfriend's mother. Jiwoo takes the cupcake container back from Sooyoung so the hug can be more comfortable.

"It's my pleasure to meet YOU!" The woman says, pulling back from the sudden hug. Sooyoung is beet red. "Jiwoo has told us so much about you! Please, please come inside!"

The couple do just that, following the mother inside her home.

In this moment, Sooyoung realizes she's never been inside of a traditional American household before. It looks like everything she always imagined it would be. Framed photographs of Jiwoo and her other cheery-looking family members cover the walls and tables, little figurines of angels and hearts placed neatly in empty spaces... It smelled like delectable spices and melting brown sugar, aromas so extraordinarily comforting to Sooyoung that she immediately felt safe. Pop hits play softly through a portable radio coming from the kitchen.

As they make their way to the living room and kitchen, they spot various family members seated in conversation. When they see who has walked in, they immediately stand to greet them with excited eyes. Sooyoung is even redder at the increased attention.

"Everyone, this is Sooyoung, Jiwoo's girlfriend!" The mother introduces, more naturally than

anyone Sooyoung's ever heard introduce their daughter's same-sex partner.

Sooyoung shakes hands with everyone else, who introduces themselves warmly. She doesn't retain the information regarding any of their names or familial roles, as she's too overwhelmed to give her complete attention.

"Oh here sweetie give me that." Jiwoo's mother takes the cupcakes from Jiwoo and runs to the kitchen to place them with the rest of the Thanksgiving food.

"I should see if she needs some help." Jiwoo says, turning to her girlfriend. "Will you be okay on your own for a little bit?" Instead of giving into her fear, Sooyoung simply nods nervously and holds onto Jiwoo's hand until she is too far out of reach.

"Sooyoung!" An older gentleman approaches from the living room. She immediately recognizes that he has the same kind eyes and approachability as her girlfriend. "Hello! Nice to meet you, I'm Jiwoo's father."

This time, Sooyoung is the one offered a hand to shake. She takes it strongly and shakes, and the older man smiles. "Woah, that's quite the firm handshake you've got there!" he says playfully.

"That's because I'm incredibly nervous," Sooyoung says honestly, making many relatives around her laugh heartily in endearment.

"What you should really be nervous about is being on the same team as Jiwoo for the Jenga game. She always knocks the thing over!" A little boy says, making Sooyoung laugh.

After some time of introducing herself to more family members, Sooyoung feels a little exhausted. Not that she was tired of meeting people, but it was just difficult for her to keep up with the family's energy. Each and every one of them was nearly just as bright as Jiwoo herself. Sooyoung finally settles near the kitchen island, so she could watch Jiwoo charm everyone yet stay at a safe distance from the boisterous American family.

Suddenly a tall woman she has yet to meet approaches Sooyoung and plops herself down right next to her.

"They're kind of hyper huh?" The woman says, much less energetic than the rest of the family that she has met so far. "But you have to love them for it right?"

"Right..." Sooyoung says quietly, unsure of how to respond.

"Sorry, you probably think I'm trying to give you shit or something. I'm Doyeon." The woman flips her hair and holds out her hand. Sooyoung shakes it as the woman continues. "I'm dating Yoojung, Jiwoo's cousin!"

They both look back into the kitchen where Yoojung is actively doing the robot with Jiwoo to the song "Baby Got Back" by Sir Mix-a-lot while simultaneously getting plates out of the cupboards.

Both of the taller women look upon their respective girlfriends with admiration. Doyeon brings her attention back to Sooyoung. "I just wanted to introduce myself because I know it can be overwhelming. But at the end of the day, you shouldn't be nervous if you're quieter than they are. Everyone here will love you no matter what. Trust me."

Sooyoung nods with a smile, glad to have another outside perspective of the family. Before either of them can say much more, Jiwoo's mother pulls a beautiful golden turkey out of the oven.

“Dinner is ready!”

Once everyone is seated at the massive table in Jiwoo’s dining room, the household’s volume level is the quietest its been all day. The family stuff their faces with the delicious food they’ve been served, and Sooyoung immediately understands where Jiwoo gets her culinary talent from. Everything on her plate is delicious.

“Where’s the PIE.” A child asks suddenly, making the grown ups laugh.

Jiwoo’s mother stands instantly. “Don’t worry Jiyeon, I’ll get the desserts out right away.” The woman giggles. “Actually, Sooyoung, since you’re closer to the kitchen, would you mind helping me?”

Sooyoung of course stands immediately, Jiwoo looking up at her with pure pride in her eyes and squeezes her hand in reassurance.

Sooyoung makes her way to the kitchen where various baked goods are sitting on the counter.

“I have one more loaf of banana bread in the oven but it’ll be done here in a minute or two!” Jiwoo’s mother says, opening the oven in order to see the progress on her dessert. “Your parents bake on Thanksgiving?”

The question sends Sooyoung’s stomach to plummet. “Um, no... We don’t really... My parents are in South Korea.”

Jiwoo’s mother notices Sooyoung’s hesitation, so she decides not to press on the issue too much. “Korea? That’s quite far from here! They must be joys to have raised such an intelligent and sweet girl.” Sooyoung smiles awkwardly. “And you’re doing so well in a completely different country! My God, Harvard! It’s not an easy thing to do you know... You should be very proud of that sweetie.”

Sooyoung smiles, genuinely touched by the woman's kind words. Even if she couldn't be so far from wrong about her parents. “Thank you,” she responds nervously.

The oven dings, and Jiwoo’s mother immediately rushes to take out a perfectly rectangular loaf of bread. Sooyoung nearly starts salivating over the smell alone as the older woman cuts the bread into small slices.

“Here go ahead and try one! It’s a very special family recipe.” The woman holds out a piece for Sooyoung to take.

The college student takes a bite, and feels like she could cry. This was the best banana bread she has ever had in her entire life. “Oh my *God*,” Sooyoung moans. “This is so... amazing.”

Jiwoo's mother smirks proudly, just like Jiwoo would. "Let me tell you my secret, Sooyoung," she says, lowering her voice. "It's applesauce," she whispers, and Sooyoung widens her eyes at the unusual ingredient that seems to have made the bread perfect. "Actually, I have the whole recipe written around here somewhere..." Jiwoo's mother walks towards a worn notebook on her kitchen countertop and rips a page from it carefully. She then proceeds to walk back over to Sooyoung and hands her the paper.

Sooyoung is honored. “I thought you said this was a family secret?” Sooyoung asks, looking at the list of ingredients on the sheet.

"It is." Jiwoo's mother says. Suddenly her face becomes a little more serious. "Sooyoung, can I ask you something?"

"Of course." Sooyoung says immediately. The two women are out of earshot from the rest of the family, standing comfortably in the kitchen.

"Do you love Jiwoo?"

Sooyoung is surprised by the sudden serious question, but answers without hesitation. "More than anything in the world."

The older woman nods her head approvingly. "Good. Because I'll tell you, honestly... I have never seen my little girl love someone as much as she loves you," she admits, smiling as Sooyoung's face lights up with love. "Really, the way she talks about you is... Well, Sooyoung, it's like you put all the stars in the sky. And lately I've been able to see this side of Jiwoo that I haven't seen in a while.

"Jiwoo has always been carefree. But when she was younger... I mean, a girl with that much energy isn't always treated nicely." Her mother continues solemnly. "She only really had Jungeun to stand up for her. They would call my baby too annoying, too loud, too in your face... One time they even told her she was born by mistake."

Sooyoung can feel her blood boiling at just the thought of her sweet Jiwoo being picked on. And at the same time, it makes her want to cry.

"She just was very self conscious after being made fun in school, you know? But lately it seems like you've made her less of that... She seems... less like she's trying to please everyone else, and more accepting of being herself." The mother continues. "She tells us you treat her like a princess. And not only that, she feels that you truly understand her. That's all we've ever wanted as parents for our daughter," she says honestly. "On top of that, she told us how you helped her with her board exam, and that is very admirable of you Sooyoung. The point is... thank you for taking care of our daughter."

Sooyoung is touched, and nods, feeling like she's been entrusted with the world's most precious gem. "Absolutely. I promise I will always take care of your daughter. In every way that I possibly can." Sooyoung says truthfully. And she means it with her entire heart. Whether it be romantically, emotionally, financially... Sooyoung was determined to never let Jiwoo struggle for anything.

Jiwoo's mother smiles brightly. "Sooyoung, you asked if it was a family recipe and I said it was. I'm giving it to you because Jiwoo wants you to be a part of her family," she says. Sooyoung feels herself becoming extremely emotional. "Our family. And I trust my baby with everything I have. So I think I would like that too."

Sooyoung doesn't know what to say.

"Thank you," she stutters out. "It would be an *honor*."

Jiwoo's mother smiles back at her warmly. Before she can catch Sooyoung get choked up, she turns her attention back to the banana bread. "What do you say we bring these out to everyone together?"

After serving the dessert to the table, Sooyoung excuses herself from the table to the restroom.

The second she locks the door, the business student bursts into tears.

In mere hours of being enveloped in the warmth of Jiwoo's family, Sooyoung has received more kindness than her own family has ever given her. Sooyoung has never felt more overwhelmed with emotion in her entire life.

She leans over the sink, crying into her hands quietly. She wonders how she got here, in a position where she was even *worthy* of such generosity and care. She honestly feels so out of place, not because she doesn't want their love, but because Sooyoung she's an imposter. There are a million people who should be here instead of her.

Sooyoung takes a couple more minutes to calm herself down. Eventually, she forces herself to stop crying as to not hog the commode. She fixes her makeup in the mirror briefly, before opening the bathroom door to head back out. She's immediately met with her girlfriend's kind eyes, looking at her with concern.

"Sooyoungie, are you ok?" Jiwoo asks, taking her girlfriend's face in her hands. She had noticed Sooyoung had fled to the bathroom for a while, and can tell now that she's been crying.

Sooyoung doesn't know how to tell her she has never felt better in her entire life. "Yes," she whispers sincerely.

"Are you sure?" Jiwoo rubs her thumbs gently over Sooyoung's cheeks.

"I'm just so happy," Sooyoung says, smiling softly at her favorite person in front of her. "You make me the *happiest*," she smiles with tears coming back to her eyes.

Jiwoo releases Sooyoung's face and wraps her arms around her instead, snuggling her face into the taller girl's neck. "I love you." Jiwoo murmurs, and Sooyoung pulls back slightly in order to see her face.

"I love you too." The business student moves a strand away from Jiwoo's face as she leans in to give her a delicate kiss. Jiwoo giggles into it, causing Sooyoung to smile as well.

"Woah-ho! When's the wedding!" Jiwoo's dad jokes, covering his eyes as if he's just seen something inappropriate.

Jiwoo laughs it off, swatting at her dad in irritation, but Sooyoung just smiles.

And as Sooyoung looks at the love of her life standing in front of her, she finds herself wondering the exact same thing.

Sooyoung proposes to Jiwoo not long after that, spending every penny she's saved on the perfect diamond ring.

Nearly half a year later, Sooyoung's heart is lodged in her throat as she sits at the end of her and Jiwoo's bed. The phone rings in her ear. Most of her prays that they don't pick up.

The ring cuts, and Sooyoung's stomach twists.

"Hello."

"Good morning Mother," Sooyoung speaks in their native tongue. It's not morning here, but she

adopts the greeting to her parents' time.

The older woman sighs in annoyance. *"What do you want, Sooyoung."*

"I'm calling because..." Sooyoung plays with the hem of her blouse nervously. "I'm getting married."

There is a long silence at the other end of the line.

"To whom?"

"To someone I love very much," Sooyoung says honestly. Her mother says nothing to this.

"Is he from a wealthy family?"

"That doesn't matter to me."

"You've always been lousy at listening to your mother," she hums. *"Thinking you won't need it when the world turns on you."*

"I wanted to invite you both to our wedding here," Sooyoung interrupts as her heart begins to race.

"What is your fiancé's name?"

"My fiancée's name is Jiwoo." Sooyoung declares with a sudden burst of confidence, deciding to just rip off the band-aid.

Sooyoung continues bravely. "Her name is Jiwoo and she is the kindest, pure-hearted person I have ever met."

Her mother is silent.

"That is not a wedding." Sooyoung's mother says. *"Your father and I are good parents. We did not raise a lesbian,"* she snaps venomously, the last word tinged with so much disgust that Sooyoung hates the sound of it.

"You did, and I am," Sooyoung says, full of shame, but remembering what Jiwoo suggested she say to their dismay. "I understand if you need time to process this. But I wanted to invite our family regardless."

"You must be joking, Sooyoung."

"...I-I'm not."

"You spit in this family's face. What a shame you've become on our name," her mother hisses.

"Mother--"

"If I were Jiwoo I would run away from you while I still can."

This hurts Sooyoung more than any declaration of disgrace.

"Hopefully then you would wake up from this little delusion."

Sooyoung doesn't realize she's crying until her hot tears drip down to her thighs.

“Please stop,” Sooyoung whispers weakly. “I just wanted to share this with you both.”

“We would never be in attendance. God help the stain you are, Sooyoung. You disgust me and you disgust us all.”

“Wait, Mother please-”

The line cuts.

Sooyoung sobs into her hands.

Jiwoo raps on the door softly, then enters to find Sooyoung curled up in bed and crying, facing their brick apartment wall.

She carefully opens up the covers and climbs into bed next to her, wrapping an arm around her fiancée to spoon her. Sooyoung blinks the tears away as Jiwoo envelopes her in her warmth.

Jiwoo presses sweet kisses to Sooyoung’s exposed shoulder, offering her support in silence.

“I invited them,” Sooyoung reports miserably.

Jiwoo didn’t think it would be a good idea when Sooyoung had asked her about it, and her beloved fiancée had agreed. But Sooyoung had not been able to quit entertaining the delusion that they may just... put all their past faults aside and just be there for her on what is going to be the most momentous day of her life. *Especially* after seeing how many family members Jiwoo had piled on her end of the guest list.

Sooyoung had none. It’s not like she had any friends, either.

“I just thought- I... Nevermind,” Sooyoung snuffles again as tears rise to her eyes once more. “It’s dumb.”

“It’s not dumb at all,” Jiwoo says softly. “And I’m so proud of you.”

Sooyoung closes her eyes in pain.

Jiwoo quietly intertwines their fingers together by Sooyoung’s chest. She presses another kiss to the milky skin of her neck, as if to seal the truth. “So proud of you,” she whispers into her skin.

Sooyoung cries all over again, emptying her frustration and anger and resentment for them onto their sheets. Jiwoo stays with her, holding her steady, her strength.

Sooyoung snuffles. “I’m- I’m so sorry Jiwoo, no one is going to come for me,” she cries.

“That’s not true,” Jiwoo whispers, curling into her favorite person protectively. And it isn’t - Jiwoo will make sure of it. “It’s gonna be fun okay? We can get a magician. I’ll try to get a tiger.”

Sooyoung sobs a little at her guilelessness. She’s never met anyone so angelic.

“Why do you even love me,” Sooyoung breathes pitifully. “You have no reason to, Jiwoo.”

“I have a million reasons to,” Jiwoo nuzzles her future wife. “...I love you because,” Jiwoo hums.

“You don’t have to be humble, but you are.”

“I love you because you’re kind, Sooyoung,” Jiwoo kisses her shoulder once more, reflecting on Sooyoung helping her study to become a teacher, with tired eyes early into the morning. When Sooyoung sacrificed an office space for Jiwoo’s bigger kitchen. Every instance that Sooyoung gave up something she wanted for Jiwoo. “You’re kinder than you think you are.”

“And I love you because there is no one else in this world who seems to understand me,” Jiwoo laughs lovingly. “Besides Jungie. But she’s kinda like, oh Jiwoo, you’re fucking *crazy*.” Jiwoo says doing an eerily accurate impersonation of Jungeun making Sooyoung laugh out loud even through her tears.

“But you’re like... Let’s be crazy together,” Jiwoo says, feeling her heart bloom. “And that’s why I’m marrying you,” Jiwoo smiles into Sooyoung’s neck. “Because I just want to be crazy with you for the *rest* of my life.”

Sooyoung turns around to face her comfortably, her teary eyes shining. She shakes her head in incredulity.

“I love you with everything I am, Jiwoo.”

Jiwoo kisses her tears away. “We don’t need them, okay?” she smiles at her beloved, meaning it with everything in her. “We never have. All we’ll ever need is you and me.”

The wedding is on a summer’s eve, outdoors, under a full moon.

Sooyoung’s parents never show, squashing any and all hope Sooyoung had that they would somehow come up with the airfare to make the trip, and somehow decide to become accepting - the latter being the more difficult of the two. None of her invitees show.

But it doesn’t matter. Jiwoo invited anyone and everyone they’ve ever interacted with: every single one of Jiwoo’s family who met and adored Sooyoung on Thanksgiving, *all* of Sooyoung’s peers from business school... Sooyoung doesn’t know how, but Jiwoo’s found the lady she pelted popcorn at during their first date. It’s a full house.

Sooyoung Ha is not a crier.

But when she walks out onto the altar, and looks onto her side of guests to find Jiwoo’s parents sitting where Sooyoung’s parents failed to be, she’s an emotional wreck before the love of her life even walks down the aisle.

For some reason, Jiwoo had insisted *Jungeun* walk her down the aisle and not her own father. Something about ‘from one soulmate to the next. You have to pass me off, like a baton.’ But however zany, Jungeun will always appease Jiwoo. Because that’s just what best friends do.

Sooyoung and Jiwoo are princesses in white as they deliver their vows to love each other for the rest of their lives. They cry the whole time under golden lights along with all of their loved ones. One of the most notable lines of the night is Sooyoung’s: “*You are the brightest thing, Jiwoo... and I fear every morning that you will pass me by, and I will wake up and realize I’ve missed it.*”

Jiwoo tries to give her vows, manages a few words about being loved unconditionally, but ends up

crying too hard in happiness to speak. Sooyoung doesn't wait for the officiant, and kisses her with all she has, lifting her bride up into her arms.

Sooyoung and Jiwoo Ha never planned to be rich.

Well, you could say Sooyoung did. But not *this* rich.

Sooyoung had always known business was a lucrative area to pursue in capitalist America. But she had studied it in a prestigious institution to be well-off overseas. Comfortable. Far from home's reach.

Sooyoung was not aware that her baseline salary would be *double* than what she was aiming for, and she had only just begun at the lavish French fashion company named Yves Saint Laurent. Not to mention investments, stocks, and the ambitious expansions she would push for financial gain... Her wealth was growing uncontrollably, and the sight of it, the ability to have anything she wanted, was revitalizing - imbuing Sooyoung with more personal autonomy than she had ever possessed in all her prior years combined. Not to mention that the amount she had to give to her parents monthly seemed insignificant - she didn't even notice it was gone.

So she pushed everything further than it ever needed to be, a ruthless queen masterminding ambitious expansions for, ultimately, her own personal gain. Knowing everything she's been through, Sooyoung figures it's only fair.

Soon enough, she made a down-payment on an enormous property at the tip top of Beverly Hills, California. Jiwoo wasn't certified to teach in a different state, but she didn't even *need* to - Sooyoung had already made enough for the two of them to never work again in their lives.

On the surface, money was thrilling - Sooyoung and Jiwoo could hold increasingly Gatsby-esque parties, take exotic trips without a care in the world, and rise to fame simply for having wealth and existing.

Underneath it all, money was a padding, insulating Sooyoung from every horrible experience she had ever been exposed to. It was no thoughtless decision to build their estate on Los Angeles's socio-geographic pinnacle. Being literally and figuratively at the top of society meant Sooyoung was close enough to be aware of millions in poverty but far enough to be distant from it. Far enough that Sooyoung could no longer see herself in every one of them.

Being rich was all the safety, all the security Sooyoung never had.

And if she got to parade through an ornate grand foyer and throw thousands of dollars of bills around with the love of her life laughing happily at her side, so be it.

When Jiwoo first mentions wanting children, it's when their apple orchard is in its first year of fruition. The couple had purchased nearly 1,000 of the most beautiful apple trees to be transplanted right in the back-end of their estate, making for a truly breathtaking sight and more apples than either of them could handle.

Jiwoo invited every family in the county, from far and wide, to come through their towering gates and pick apples for free. Children ran through the trees playing and laughing, their laughter lighting up the property as blown bubbles flew through the air. As they played happily under the bright sun happily with their families, Jiwoo watched them with a fond smile.

As Sooyoung approached her through the grass to join her, Jiwoo smiled at her and moved to rest

her head on her wife's shoulder. Sooyoung wrapped an arm around her beloved.

"Can you see it honey?" Jiwoo asked softly. "Kids of our own running around here?"

Sooyoung chokes on her own spit. She clears her throat after a coughing fit with wide eyes, while Jiwoo giggles affectionately. So far, they'd gone nearly two years into their marriage without either one of them insinuating *that* outside of playful jokes.

"Just a question," Jiwoo whispers gently with a blissful smile as she leans into Sooyoung's side, intertwining their fingers at her waist. The idea terrifies the CEO-to-be.

But what did Sooyoung expect? Jiwoo *adored* children as a teacher, and was adored by them all the same. She held the value of family so near and dear, how could she not dream of children of her own? Sooyoung sighs, as she watches two parents help a child pick a ripe apple from a tree, the toddler laughing happily atop their father's shoulders.

The child looks... happy. Not worried about if her parents would be evicted tomorrow. Not worried about going hungry, or the sounds of her father hurting her mother.

Happy.

Sooyoung feels the warmth from their seemingly isolated moment involuntarily permeate into her own heart.

"Hypothetically," Sooyoung stresses carefully. "I'd be okay with *one*," she declares firmly.

"Okay," Jiwoo smirks triumphantly, feeling love blossom within her chest. She turns her head a little in Sooyoung's embrace. "One." Her angel confirms, then connects their soft lips for a warm kiss.

Sooyoung is utterly terrified at the new prospect.

But she thinks about a little Jiwoo running around, another angel filling every crevice of Sooyoung's world with joy. Suddenly, Sooyoung isn't so scared anymore.

Chapter End Notes

here is my playlist for these two <333:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3iBalJkuWbyMsxDAaUEMz4?si=IXfMTeulQIGJHS9H8kBF-A>

check out the account as well! i have a few more character playlists and will probably make more :D - Cat

present day msd!chuuves hard and cold backstory msd!chuuves soft and warm
-daniela

twitters:
@jiwoorene (Daniela)

@igbtchuuves (Cat)

ask us things:

curiouscat.me/catmsdqna (Cat)

curiouscat.me/yoojungsua (Daniela)

End Notes

hyunjin deserves better and that better is LIA - Cat

wow that was a little fucked up of them wasnt it? SLKDJFSDKLJ

as always, let me know what you thought about the story, what your favorite part was and if you're excited for the next chapter :p - daniela

Twitter: @jiwoorene

@igbtchuuves

CuriousCat: curiouscat.me/yoojungsua

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!